





THE
SADDEST OF ALL IS LOVING.

BY
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AUTHOR OF "KENNETH RAYMOND," ETC.

"He that writes
Or makes a feast, more certainly invites
His judges than his friends; there's not a guest
But will find something wanting, or ill-drest."
—Sir R. HOWARD.



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TO

HON. W. M. ROBBINS,

OF STATESVILLE, N. C.,

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

BY THE AUTHOR.

THE SADDEST OF ALL IS LOVING.

CHAPTER I.

IN a room of a dreary-looking convent, situated in a small town in one of the rural districts of Pennsylvania, sat a refined, sad-faced woman (past her youth) absorbed in reading. It was towards the close of a hot day of the waning summer, but in Sister Florine's apartment, the dim, quiet coolness contrasted pleasantly with the outside heat and glare, while the fresh, vivid green of the carefully tended plants that filled and shaded the low windows, and were grouped prettily on rustic stands about the room, was truly refreshing to the eye, wearied for long weeks with the parched earth and drooping vegetation withering under a scorching August sun.

Presently the quiet was broken by the entrance of a young girl—apparently about seventeen years of age—so rarely beautiful, that you almost held your breath as you gazed, with much the same feeling one would have when viewing for the first time, the *Flora* of Titian, of which Grace Greenwood says, "Its soft, sunny, luxurious loveliness, filled my soul with a strange and passionate delight."

And such "soft, sunny, luxurious loveliness" had Nellie Stacey, who, throwing herself on a hassock at the sister's feet, said passionately, while angry tears dimmed the dark lustrous eyes, "I will never go to confession again."

"Why, Nellie! what is the matter?" asked Sister Florine, looking up from her book with surprise at the usually gentle, sweet-tempered girl.

"Dear sister, I think it is right that I should tell you (for I have begged him to desist, and he will not), that Father Laurence talks to me as he ought not to do; and I don't see any use in confession anyway," replied the indignant Nellie.

"My child! that is wrong—but what did the father say to offend you?"

"He is always calling me a sweet sinner, and saying I am too pretty to do wrong, and asking me to kiss him—and—and various other things," said the girl, reluctant to accuse one whom Sister Florine held in such reverence.

"Well, my dear, the holy father only wishes to encourage you to be as good as you are lovely, perhaps; I see no great harm in that," returned the sister, fondly smoothing the jetty waves of hair from the low brow, where it lay in damp, curling rings, around the sweet, flushed face of the young girl.

"But, sister, I see I shall have to tell you everything, to make you understand. Father Laurence makes love to me every time I go to confession; he has even asked me to marry him—to elope with him; says I am dearer to him than his holy office of priest—dearer than his hopes of heaven—and all such nonsense; and he at the same time, threatens me with terrible punishment, if I tell—but I can endure it no longer, and I cannot go to him again."

"And you shall not, child! Why did you not tell me this before! How long has it been going on?" exclaimed Sister Florine, shocked beyond measure at Nellie's revelations.

"For some time—in fact, soon after he came he began to make pretty speeches to me, but has been getting more bold in his avowals of love, until I thought it my duty to

tell you, and refuse to give him any further opportunity. Oh, I almost hate him, sister! How different he is from dear, good Father Ambrose!"

"Yes, yes! but who would have believed *this* of him? he, a priest, and guide of the young in the paths of righteousness and truth! What shall I do? I must tell the mother, and have this wolf in sheep's clothing removed. Oh! it is awful to think of the danger you have been exposed to, my poor lamb!" and the sister shuddered as she thought of what "might have been," had her dear Nellie been beguiled by the false, wicked priest.

"But, sister, Mother Serena will not believe it—she hates me so much, she would be sure to say it was a trumped-up story, born in my fertile imagination, and at once empty the vials of her wrath on my devoted head for daring to malign a priest! No, sister, please do not tell her—only let me go away—help me to go away from this hateful place, and that horrid priest—will you not?" pleaded Nellie.

"Where would you go, child? Your guardian is a myth—your relatives, your very birthplace, unknown to you—where would you go?"

"Let me answer that advertisement we saw in the *Baltimore Gazette*. I have been thinking so much of it, and had decided, with your permission, to apply for the situation; may I not, dear sister?" asked Nellie, eagerly.

"What is it, dear? Let me see it again; I did not pay much heed, thinking it a whim you would soon forget, perhaps," said Sister Florine.

"No, indeed; I was in earnest when I spoke of it before, and still more in earnest now—see, I put it carefully away in my drawer," returned Nellie, as she took the paper from its safe hiding-place; "let me read it."

"WANTED.—A governess, for two small children, in a healthy locality, near a village. Duties light, and a liberal

salary. Address—Mrs. Howard Hamilton, Baltimore, or Major Walter Stacey, Clinton, Ga.”

“Oh ! I do hope it is Major Stacey who wants a governess, for I should so like to go South !” exclaimed Nellie, as she finished reading the advertisement—and before Sister Florine had time to make any comment—“and he may be a relation ; was I not born at the South, sister ?”

“I do not know, my dear ; you were here when I came, you know, and the mother has always refused to tell me your birthplace, and the name of your guardian. But I cannot help thinking you were born beneath a Southern sky, my impulsive, warm-hearted Nellie !”

“Oh, I do hope it is true ; and if so, dear sister, it is only another reason why I should apply for this situation, for it may lead to my finding out something of my family and birthplace. And you must acknowledge it is rather strange, the coincidence of names—do, do say, dear sister, that I may try,” pleaded the girl, as she kneeled at the sister’s side, and looked up beseechingly into the sad, tender eyes, that had never held aught for her, in their placid depths, but loving glances.

“Stacey is rather a common name, my dear ; don’t build hopes on so slight a foundation ; besides, what will the mother say ? Her consent is much more important than mine, and I feel sure she will oppose such a step,” replied Sister Florine.

“She need not know it until it is all arranged,” urged Nellie ; “you can make the application for me—she does not read your letters. Please, dear sister, I am so miserable here !” And the young girl leaned her head on the bosom of her only friend, and wept, as she thought of her lonely life, and the mystery that enshrouded it.

“Child ! you are so young to go out alone into the world ; and yet dangers beset you even here, and I am powerless to protect you ! Let me tell the mother, she surely

would not wish that bad man to remain—and then you will be content to wait, my dear, until your guardian comes for you—will you not?”

“No, oh no! he will never come; and I do not care to see him, after neglecting me all these years. Let me go, sister, I am so weary of the monotony of this place, and I must go away from—that—man,” reiterated Nellie, between her sobs.

“Well, well, hush, my dear! I will write the letter, and then see what I can do with the mother. Dry your tears, and may you never shed any more bitter in the world after which you long,” said Sister Florine, soothingly.

“Thank you, my dear, my only friend! You are all I have to love in this gloomy place since dear Father Ambrose died—to you I owe every moment of brightness my life has known, and I shall grieve to part with you, but let me go out into the bright world, and find happiness; here, everything is repugnant to my joyous nature, and I pine for freedom, like an imprisoned bird!”

“I fear, my child, your bright anticipations will never be realized; I know the world, you imagine so full of joy and happiness—even there, trouble and disappointment—how bitter, may *you* never experience—came to me; and I was glad to retire with my wounded heart, for healing and consolation, in solitude, and the service of Him, who alone is true,” said Sister Florine, sadly.

“Oh, sister! have you, so good, so unselfish, known such bitter sorrow?” Nellie says, with tender sympathy. “Surely such will not be my fate!”

“I pray God and our Sweet Mother, it may not be, my child! Few have such trials as I have endured; still, do not look for unalloyed happiness, it is not found in this world. But I will not dampen, perhaps needlessly, your bright hopes; bring my desk, and I will write at once.”

“Please sister, only mention my first, and middle name;

I have a fancy to be known simply as *Elenor Fane*, until I know what right I have to the name of Stacey. You know my full name is, Elenora Fane Stacey, so I will not change, but only *suppress, a part of it*," said Nellie, laughing at her own conceit. Poor child! little did she imagine how dearly this innocent suppression would cost her! "I do not wish that mythical guardian of mine to discover my whereabouts (he keeps me so much in the dark, why should I not be equally mysterious?) as I fear he might take measures to compel my return, he, and the mother, to these prison walls. So I will just give them, 'this Roland for their Oliver,' as your say."

Sister Florine smiled, as she replied, "I do not like sailing under false colors, my dear, but under the circumstances, I cannot blame you, for your guardian and Mother Serena are treating you shamefully, in thus keeping you in ignorance of all that concerns your past and future, and I feel justified in doing all I can to thwart their schemes, which I fear are not what they should be, in regard to you."

"Oh, thank you, my dear, good sister! I shall feel like a new being—poor little Nellie Stacey remains in the obscurity to which they have doomed her, and Elenor Fane goes forth into the world to conquer fate, hopeful and happy!" And Nellie clapped her hands, and waltzed around Sister Florine, in the exuberance of her joy at the bare idea of escape from her dull life in the convent.

"Do not be too sanguine, my dear, you have not secured the situation yet," said Sister Florine, smiling in spite of herself, at Nellie's undignified, though not ungraceful manner of showing her delight. "But I will write to Mrs. Howard Hamilton, for her husband is a dear cousin of mine and has hardly forgotten, I guess, the Eveline Howard of those old happy days, when we knew and loved each other."

"What a beautiful name you had in the world, sister; I could not have given it up. Will you not tell me the story

of your life before you entered the convent, *mon amie?*” asked Nellie, as she again seated herself, forgetful for the moment, of the all-important letter, in her desire to learn something of Sister Florine’s earlier life.

“Not now, child, sometime perhaps before we part; let me write, or my letter will be too late for the mail.”

* * * * *

Mrs. Hamilton replied without delay, saying she would at once engage Miss Fane, upon her cousin’s recommendation, as her brother, Major Stacey, had left it entirely to her to secure a governess for his children. She mentioned amount of salary (which was liberal enough to satisfy Sister Florine—it was of minor importance to Nellie), and also suggested that they write to her brother, and learn the time he wished Miss Fane to enter on her duties, and elicit any other information they desired, adding, “My husband sends kindest love and remembrance to his ‘cousin Evie,’ and hopes you will consent very soon to make us a visit, in which desire I heartily join. We are truly glad to hear from you once more, and regret your retirement from society, where you once shone pre-eminent.”

Sister Florine and the mother had a stormy interview; the latter angrily refusing her consent to the contemplated step. “Well,” said Sister Florine, she is determined to go; everything has been arranged, and I do not think Nellie owes obedience to you, and a guardian who keeps her in ignorance of the most important events and interests of her life—all of which she has a right to know, at her age. Tell her who her guardian is—give her his address, and she will write and ask his consent to the arrangement—she is anxious to do so.”

“I *will not*—he does not wish to be known at present, as I have told you before. Let her go, if she will; I wash my hands of her, and shall write to inform her guardian that she has left my care and the convent, in defiance of

my wishes or consent." But she really had no such intention, as the sequel will show.

"Very well," returned Sister Florine, as she rose to leave the room, "I will take all the responsibility; and when her guardian comes (which he has little idea of doing, it seems), I will satisfy him in regard to the matter. She shall go—and I will stand between her and all danger from him or anyone else," and with this Sister Florine left the room, and the obstinate woman—more excited and provoked than she had been for years. Mother Serena noted her words and manner, and could not help a slight feeling of uneasiness; for Sister Florine was the only being of whom the imperious mother stood a little in awe (and who dared defy her), knowing that under that placid exterior there was a will strong as her own. She also knew the value of Sister Florine's vast wealth to the convent—the control of which, however, she wisely kept in her own hands; as she did the liberty to withdraw herself from its walls at her pleasure.

Sister Florine had always loved the beautiful and lonely child from the first, and had made her life much less hard since she came; and as Nellie developed into the interesting girl, her love had grown and strengthened, until she trembled to cherish such feelings again for any earthly being. And Nellie clung to the sad, gentle sister with a passionate affection, that, since Father Ambrose's death, had been all lavished on this one, only friend, who kept life from being a Sahara to her youthful feet, with no fountain at which to slake the thirsting of her longing heart for the sweet waters of affection.

It was a great trial to Sister Florine to give up her bright, pleasant companionship and caressing love, but she believed it best for Nellie, and her unselfish regard for the young girl, made her determine she should not be thwarted in her desire to leave the convent. And now, when this

new danger threatened her darling, she dared not hesitate, but was quite as anxious as Nellie, to get her safely away, for she knew the difficulties that would arise, as the girl had said, in bringing any charges against the priest—who seemed to be a man after the mother's own heart—not being troubled with over-much righteousness. So the good woman was soon busy in making additions to Nellie's scanty wardrobe, until the young girl was in raptures, which was quite natural, for the mother had always kept her in the very plainest and scantiest of clothing, and Sister Florine had not thought it necessary in the seclusion of the convent, and school-girl life, to add more attractive dress, though in a thousand other ways Nellie had already received much at the hands of her loving benefactress. Indeed, it was a kind Providence that sent to the neglected little orphan the tender care and protection of this refined and cultivated woman; and the influence she had exerted in the formation of Nellie's character, was quite apparent. She had spared no pains to improve her naturally fine mind, and besides the regular course of study pursued in the convent, had read with, and to her, such books as were improving; and by conversation on lighter topics, supplied the lack of intercourse with polite society. So that Nellie was quite as accomplished, polished, and self-possessed as if she had been under training at a so-called fashionable boarding-school, and yet lacked nothing of the modest charm and naturalness which is so apt to be lost in the modelling of a fashionable young lady.

Major Stacey named the 1st of October as the time he wished Nellie to enter on her duties, but added, "Miss Fane had better come a week or so earlier, to explore her surroundings, and feel at home; and the day of her departure was drawing very near, but not too fast for Nellie, who was all impatience to be gone. Poor girl!

could she have known under what circumstances she would return to Sister Florine's loving arms, she would no doubt, have retreated to the gloomiest corner of those hated walls, and shut and barred, with eager hand, the door through which she was about to go out into the fair and beautiful world, and dashed to earth the sparkling cup of hope and happiness she saw, in imagination, held temptingly near her outstretched hand and longing lips !

Sister Florine had added to her many other gifts, a beautiful writing-desk ; and the night before her departure, Nellie sat with it on her lap, examining and admiring, for the twentieth time perhaps, its handsome appointments, and delicate stationery.

"O, Sister Florine !" she exclaimed presently, as though impelled to give expression to the thoughts and emotions that filled her heart, "how can I ever repay you for all your goodness to a poor, lonely orphan ; and added to all, the crowning acts of the last few weeks !" The quick tears sprang to the lovely dark eyes, and putting down the desk, she knelt by the sister's side, and twining her arms lovingly around her, wept convulsively. For now, as she realized that she was parting with her only friend, the thought came over her—"Shall I ever find such another in the world to which I am going alone and friendless ? Can anything repay me for her loss ?" And she said aloud, "How I wish you were going with me, dearest ! my heart fails me, as the time draws near to leave you, and I am almost tempted to give it all up."

"No, no, too late to repent now, my dear ; you should have counted the cost before—cheer up ! it is best so : the parting will not be long, and will only make our reunion dearer and sweeter," said Sister Florine, cheerfully (though her own heart was very sad), as she bent and kissed the beautiful tear-stained face. "And, my child, you can more than repay me for all I have done, by ful-

filling the promise of your girlhood—I ask no more. Learn to look to the only true Source for strength and guidance ; let not your beauty prove a snare, but remember it is nothing without the more enduring beauty of the soul and graces of the heart, that sanctify and ennoble mere personal loveliness—in other words, neglect not the precious jewel, in your care for the frail and perishing casket that enshrines it.”

“I will try, my more than mother, to be all you so fondly hope : pray for your little Nellie, and that will be my greatest safeguard, to remember there is one true, loving heart that is watching my career, and will rejoice or grieve, as I succeed or fail in my endeavors to grow into a noble and useful woman. Now, dear sister, tell me something of your own life, as you promised, that I may gain wisdom from your experience, and be warned of the dangers at which you hint.”

Sister Florine had observed with great pleasure how, in the past weeks, the thoughtless girl had merged into the more thoughtful and dignified woman, who was fast adjusting herself to the new position she was to fill, her self-reliance developing in view of the responsibilities she was about to assume ; but she thought a recital of her own trials might further benefit Nellie, and temper her too sanguine expectations of happiness : so she replied, “I will try, my dear, but fear I shall weary you.”

“Oh no, do tell me ! it is not late, and I am too excited to sleep anyway.”

* * * * *

“Be sure to write Nellie, as soon as you reach the end of your journey, for I shall feel very anxious about you, darling,” said Sister Florine, the next morning, as they drove to the station, “Mr. Mortimer, under whose care, you know, I have placed you, will meet us at the depot ;

you will be perfectly safe, until he delivers you over to Major Stacey."

"Don't forget my *new name*, when you introduce me," whispered Nellie, "and be sure to direct your letters to *Elenor Fane*."

CHAPTER II.

"HUGH, when are you going to Roselawn? I have never known you delay so long before; and they will think it very strange. I told Ada what day you were coming, so she is not ignorant of your arrival; you certainly find an unusual attraction here, or are very indifferent to the claims of old friends upon you," said Mrs. Walter Stacey, to her brother, Hugh Legare, as they lingered in the cosy breakfast-room, after the rest of the household had left it.

"There certainly is an 'unusual attraction,' Lily, in the person of your beautiful governess; but really, I have been remiss without intending it, for it is so very pleasant to be *at home* once more, I have yielded to the charm, ignoring all other claims, but I will go at once; have you any commands?" asked the young man, rising as he spoke, and stroking the head of a beautiful greyhound, that had also risen from his after-breakfast nap before the fire, and was looking up with evident expectancy into Hugh's face. "You may go with me, old fellow," he said to the dog, who seemed to understand, and curled himself up again on the rug, to await his master's movements.

"Yes; you may tell Ada I shall count on her certainly, to aid me in making your Christmas festival a success; so she can be getting up her most bewitching costume," replied his sister.

"I thought your friend needed not the foreign aid of ornament, in your eyes," returned her brother.

"Neither does she ; but one must dress, since our foolish mother ate the apple, so one had as well dress becomingly—though Ada would look charming attired in fig-leaves."

"Suppose you suggest that she grace the occasion in that primitive costume ; no doubt she would attract more attention than in one of Worth's latest, and that is the object at which your sex aim, in their extravagant and often ridiculous, adornment," retorted Hugh.

"Now you are ridiculous ; do go, and—stop ! tell Ada I shall need her good taste, in the decoration of my rooms ; and she and May must come over the day before the party ; now, don't forget !"

"Not if I can help it, but you know my failing, so don't count on your messages being delivered *verbatim*—I will be back to dinner."

Mrs. Stacey sat lost in thought for some time after her brother had gone, and her reflections were not comforting ; for though she was attached to her governess, and had admired her greatly from the first, it was no part of her plan that she should prove a rival to her special friend and favorite, Ada Singleton. And Hugh's involuntary glances of admiration from the moment he met Miss Fane, had aroused a feeling of uneasiness, which his recently avowed opinion in regard to her beauty, did not tend to lessen, and well might she be troubled. Few men could look unmoved on such beauty as was the dangerous dower of Elenor Fane—who, in the few months she had been in the South, seemed to have bloomed into new and more perfect loveliness, like some rare flower transplanted to a more genial soil beneath softer skies. Her dark, dreamy eyes, held you spellbound searching their unfathomed depths, the crisp waves of jetty hair shaded the low brow (so

lovely in a woman), and made the creamy, olive complexion seem almost fair, by contrast—the delicately chiselled nose was perfect. There was no color, save in the exquisite lips, that when they parted in her bright, child-like smile, disclosed teeth beautifully white and regular. Her figure was slight, but unusually developed and rounded for one so young, and to all was added a grace of movement, and charm of manner, peculiarly her own.

* * * * *

Aspendale, the plantation of Major Stacey, lay on the outskirts of the pretty little town of Clinton, Middle Georgia. The house was a quaint, but rather handsome building, that had been the abode of the Legares for years. It had been remodelled and modernized by Mrs. Stacey's father (who died soon after her marriage), and as Hugh would not consent to live at the old homestead, he requested, as his last wish, that she would still remain—for she was living with him at the time of his death—and keep it from passing into the hands of strangers. And it was really her dearest wish, for here had all her happy childhood and girlhood been passed. Here had Walter Stacey wooed and won her for his bride—here from her window she could see the white shafts, pointing heavenward, that marked the resting-places of her beloved dead—her dear parents, a sweet sister, and later, a lovely cherub boy, whose loss still cast a shadow over the household hearth. No, she could not have borne to give up the dear old place, with all its wealth of sweet and tender associations. The wide avenue of aged aspens—making a lovely shaded walk, with a broad sanded carriage-drive in the centre—had listened oft to the whispers of love, and trembled in unison to the caressing breeze. The present master of Aspendale was a genial high-toned Southern gentleman, evidently “to the manner born.” He had fine black eyes, with abundant hair and whiskers of the same shade—was at least six feet in his

boots, and altogether as fine a specimen of the *genus homo* as could be found in the State. Mrs. Stacey had been considered, in her girlhood, a perfect type of blonde beauty; and many thought her improved by that *embonpoint* which adds to the dignity, if not the beauty, of the matron. Maud and Walter, their only children, and their governess, made up the household. All was bustle and preparation at Aspendale for the Christmas holidays—not altogether such as in *ante bellum* days, but Mrs. Stacey determined it should be as much like the dear old times as possible. She had promised Hugh a party, as an additional inducement—if he needed one—to leave the gayer city of Savannah, and pass the time with her. Hugh Legare might be considered by many persons to be a handsomer man than his good brother-in-law, though hardly, I think, as fine looking. He was the exact counterpart of his sister, without being in the least degree effeminate, and his character was by no means of the inspired type, whatever might be thought of his blonde beauty. In fact, he was a young man of strong and defined feelings and opinions—full of enthusiasm, ambition, and energy; and I knew if he ever loved, it would be with corresponding fervor and devotion. That he never yet had acknowledged his grand capacity for loving satisfied, was evident; but when he felt the soft glances of Elenor Fane's dark eyes, he knew then as well as he knew each succeeding day, that he had found his soul's queen. Hugh was working hard to make a name, as a lawyer, in Savannah, and if rumor was to be depended on, with considerable success. Mrs. Stacey had been both mother and sister to him, since their mother's death, which occurred when Hugh was comparatively a boy; and he was her darling, her pride—her one only near relative living. And must her dearest wish for him be disappointed? Her fears had been aroused and would not “down at her bidding;” meantime she was too

busy with her preparations to note all that might have confirmed those fears.

"Well, Hugh, how are all at Roselawn? and will Ada come and assist me in my decorations?" asked Mrs. Stacey, as her brother came in, after dinner was nearly over.

"All well, and Miss Ada will come with pleasure; but the soup is cold," replied Hugh, taking his seat opposite Elenor.

"Serve you right, if it is; I thought punctuality one of the cardinal virtues with you," returned his sister.

"So it is; but I had delayed calling so long, I hoped to make amends by the length of my visit; and I really enjoyed the time so much, it passed more quickly than I thought. Dr. Singleton was at home, and I always enjoy his society."

"Of course, Mr. Legare, you did not enjoy Miss Ada's company, we are to conclude," said Elenor, with one of her irresistible smiles.

"Pardon me, I did not say so, Miss Fane; but like your sex generally, you jump to conclusions too hastily," smiled Hugh in return. "By the way, Lily, how May has grown, and so pretty, too; she will soon be a young lady—I told her I should wait for her."

"Hugh, you ought not to put foolish notions in that child's head. May is very precocious, and as unlike Ada as it is possible for sisters to be," said Mrs. Stacey.

"Yes, she will be a much more brilliant and beautiful woman, though not a better one, I will admit," returned Hugh.

"No one could be that," said Mrs. Stacey, ever ready to defend her favorite, "and Ada is pretty enough, and very attractive, don't you think so, Elenor?"

"Indeed, I do; I am much pleased with Miss Singleton, she is so unaffected and warm-hearted."

"Certainly, she is all that; though not so beautiful in

my eyes as in Lily's," returned Hugh. "Miss Fane, shall we not take that ride this afternoon? it is very pleasant out, and as you are anxious to learn, we had better take advantage of this fine weather. Lily, I think Miss Fane might venture to mount your mare, Lightfoot, with safety, eh, Walter?"

"Yes, I think her perfectly safe, or I should not let your sister ride her; but you seem to take it for granted Miss Elenor will go, she has not said so yet," replied Major Stacey.

"But she will, will you not, Miss Fane?" asked Hugh, with an eagerness he could not conceal.

"Thank you, Mr. Legare, I should like very much to learn to ride, and if Mrs. Stacey does not want me to assist her, will go with pleasure."

"No, Elenor, go, I shall rest this afternoon, but you should go at once, it is late now, and the afternoons are so short," replied Mrs. Stacey.

"I fear, Mr. Legare, you will find me such a tyro in the equestrian art, you will regret having offered to be my cavalier."

"Never fear, I have had more disagreeable duties to perform, I assure you; but I will order the horses, while you don your riding-habit."

"I shall have to improvise one, for the occasion, as this is my first attempt in that line, unless Mrs. Stacey can help me out from her wardrobe," replied Elenor, as Hugh left the room.

"You are very welcome, Elenor; tell Betty to bring you what I have, and make your own selection; they are rather old-fashioned, and not very extensive, as I have almost given up horseback riding of late."

"Much to my regret, and your own injury, Lily; I wish you would resume the exercise, now that you will have a companion, in Miss Elenor," urged Major Stacey. "Lily,"

he said a little later, when they were alone, "I think Hugh is decidedly impressed, I have never seen him so interested in a woman before, not even your friend Ada."

"O, Walter! don't say so, you are confirming what I hoped was only my jaundiced imagination; if I should be disappointed in my cherished wish regarding him and Ada, I shall be sorry Elenor Fane ever set foot in this house," said Mrs. Stacy, with much feeling.

"My dear, you are wrong, we can never know what is for the best; and I am sure, it is not so dreadful to think of such a beautiful girl as a sister-in-law; besides your fears may be groundless, it is but natural Hugh should admire her, and it may be nothing more. Why, I should fall in love with her myself, if I were a single man; but don't worry yourself, darling, or I shall be sorry I noticed his seeming fancy, or mentioned it, at any rate."

"No, it is not seeming, it is real. I see how blind I have been to expose Hugh to the charm of her marvellous beauty, for that she is beautiful, I will admit, but we know nothing about her—

' Who was her father?
Who was her mother?
Had she a sister?
Had she a brother? "

quoted Mrs. Stacey, the troubled look deepening in her blue eyes, so like the brother's, she felt all a mother's anxious solicitude for.

"Well, what does it matter, so she is a refined and cultivated woman herself? She may have the bluest blood in the country in her veins, for aught we know to the contrary; such a fine-looking girl can be of no plebeian extraction, I'll warrant. But do go and rest, you look worn out; and I cannot have you injuring your health and beauty, even for your beloved Hugh," and Major Stacey kissed his

wife and went out, to order his horse for a ride over his plantation.

A little later Elenor came down, holding up her long black skirt, of some heavy material, while on her lithe graceful figure, was a black velvet jacket, that fitted to perfection. A jaunty black velvet cap, with drooping white plume (a relic of Mrs. Stacey's girlish days), seemed just the thing for her warm brunette loveliness, so that Hugh's first glance of approval was unconcealed, as he said, "Well, Miss Fane, you might win immortal fame, if in verse you could equal your talent at improvising an equestrian costume."

"Do you think so? I am glad I shall do you no discredit in my dress, if my awkward riding tries your patience; but I am at your service, and fear I have kept you waiting."

"No, but we will go. Do not be afraid, that is the great secret of a good horsewoman, or man either, for I think most horses are so sensible, they know when they carry a timid person," and with some little explanation and instruction, they were soon riding slowly down the long avenue, Hugh reassuring her, and pointing out the beauties of the landscape, which though a winter one, possessed many attractions.

When they reached the highway, Elenor sat her horse so well, and seemed so fearless, Hugh said, "I think we might venture on a little canter, you seem quite at home in your new character," and when Major Stacey (who had emerged by a farm-gate into the road) met them, he was astonished at seeing Elenor ride with such confidence; and as they passed him, said, "Well done, I thought you one of our accomplished equestrians from town."

As they reached the quiet road, farther into the country, they slackened their pace, evidently preferring conversation to cantering. The sun was disappearing when they

returned, and the bracing air had tinged Elenor's cheeks with a rose-tint they did not usually wear, and Hugh thought, as he lifted her from the saddle, he had never seen anything half so lovely, as she was at that moment; and he could not refrain from saying, "You should ride often Miss Fane, for the winter air has painted your cheeks, enhancing the beauty I thought was already perfect."

"Why, Mr. Legare, I did not think you were a flatterer; are you not afraid of making me vain?—that is, if I were silly enough to believe you," replied Elenor, the color deepening on her cheeks.

"I will not accuse you of affectation, Miss Fane—but you have a mirror—look in that (which you will be sure to do, if you are like the rest of your sex), and see if I am a flatterer: I think all the talk about unconscious beauty, is nonsense—for no woman was ever pretty yet, that she did not know it only too well; and know its power, too. I believe with Sidney Smith: 'How exquisitely absurd to tell girls that beauty is of no value, dress of no use! The great thing is to teach them their just value, and that there must be something better than a pretty face for real happiness. But never sacrifice truth.'"

"His satanic majesty can quote Scripture to prove himself in the right," she answered, gayly, "and if you bring such high authority as the witty divine, I must yield the point—but I will be too late for tea, if I listen longer to your seductive reasoning," and Elenor ran hastily up-stairs, her heart aglow—as well as her cheeks—with youth and happiness.

* * * * *

After tea, when the children had been taken away by Maumer Betty, Hugh begged his sister to sing some of the old songs they used to sing together (for he was passionately fond of music, and a fine singer himself), in the happy past. "That now seems far away, Miss Fane," he

said, turning to Elenor, "and, as Madame De Staël says, 'nothing recalls the past like music.' Come, Lily," going over to Mrs. Stacey, and taking her hand to lead her to the piano.

"Hugh, I am so out of practice, and do not feel very well to-night; do excuse me. Elenor will play for you, which will be decidedly more agreeable, pleaded his sister.

"Will you, indeed, Miss Fane? I have been wondering if you did not sing;" for, as was very unusual with her, Elenor had not touched the piano, or sang—except softly, in her own room—since Hugh came.

"I fear I shall prove a poor substitute for your sister, Mr. Legare—but what will you have? I sing ballads mostly," and without waiting for a reply, Elenor seated herself at the instrument, and running her hands lightly over the keys in a graceful prelude, sang that old (she had learned it from Sister Florine), but exquisitely sweet and sad song, by Mrs. Hemans, "The Messenger Bird," with so much expression and feeling, that Mrs. Stacey, who was in rather a sad mood, could not keep back the tears, when she thought of her loved ones who had gone to that "spirit land;" and her heart longingly echoed the question, "Do they love there still?" Even Hugh's eyes looked rather misty, and he thought Elenor's voice—as everything else about her—perfect. It certainly harmonized with her soft, languid beauty, and was full of melody and flute-like sweetness—though not of great power or compass.

Elenor perceived the effect of her song, and hastened to say, "Why, I have given you all the blues; let me banish them—this is no time for sadness, with Christmas at the door," and the merry airs and amusing songs that followed, certainly accomplished her object.

CHAPTER III.

THE sun rose bright and clear, the day before the party, and not long after came Ada and May—so eager were they to be of real service to their friend. A servant had been dispatched to the woods for holly, mistletoe, ferns, mosses, anything green that the cold and frost had spared; and there had been very little of either—as it had been, thus far, one of the mildest winters, within the memory of that convenient oracle—the oldest inhabitant. For ivy, they had only to go to the aspens, many of whose trunks were entirely concealed by it; and Major Stacey had often threatened to have it cut away, fearing the trees would be injured, but Mrs. Stacey begged he would not, saying it relieved somewhat the ghostly look of the white trunks, when the trees were bare of foliage, and made green oases in the winter landscape. Almost before the girls were warm, and had chatted awhile around the fire as to the most effective decorations, the foragers returned with their cart-load of trophies from the woods—then the busy fingers and tongues were not still for many minutes together. Hugh begged hard to be allowed to assist, and made himself really so useful, they were glad to have him. Even Major Stacey looked in—when an unusual burst of merriment reached his sanctum—and would make a pretence of arranging a festoon here and there, pinch May's cheeks, and tease her about his bachelor brother, then leave them for the more congenial quiet of his study. Maud and Wattie also made a great show of helping, but were more noisy often than was agreeable—but Mrs. Stacey hated to check

too harshly their youthful exuberance of spirits. Hugh, however, was not so forbearing, and did not hesitate to threaten them with banishment when they became too boisterous. Mrs. Stacey found Elenor quite as helpful as Ada, and possessed of exquisite taste and inventive genius—her long pupilage in the convent having made her quite an adept in Christmas decorations. Her hanging baskets were marvels of taste, with their drooping ivy and fern leaves, interspersed with the scarlet holly berries and the pearly mistletoe.

Ada could but observe (it was the first time she had seen them together) how Hugh was ever by Elenor's side, proffering assistance where it did not seem needed; and Elenor would say, "I can do very well, thank you; help Miss Ada with those festoons," or "May gives me all the assistance I need;" but it was little use, he was back again before she had missed him, and she was forced to let him remain, or draw attention to what she hoped would otherwise pass unnoticed.

So the day went quickly and pleasantly by, and all professed themselves satisfied with the result of their efforts; and, indeed, one must have been difficult to please, that could have found fault. The parlors were thrown, by folding-doors, into one, and presented a scene truly arcadian and fairy-like; a stout covering of canvas had been stretched entirely over both carpets, for dancing, and a stand erected in the wide hall for the musicians, which was also prettily decorated. And now the rooms were closed, and all was in readiness for—

"The music, and the banquet, and the wine,
The garlands, the rose-odors, and the flowers,
The sparkling eyes, and flashing ornaments,
The white arms, and the raven hair . . .
The many twinkling feet, so small and sylph-like,
In the gay dance of bounding beauty's train."

Roselawn, the home of the Singletons, was nearer the village, and almost in a direct line between it and Aspendale. There was a pretty shaded walk through the grounds, of which each family availed themselves, in their intimate and familiar intercourse, without the necessity of entering the public highway, except when riding. Dr. Singleton had been for years the "beloved physician" of Clinton and the surrounding country. Called to part with his wife, to whom he was most tenderly attached, when Ada was just entering her teens, and May, a child of eight years, he had never sought to fill her place in his heart or home, and though his grief was deep and poignant, he abated nothing of his professional diligence; and to the casual observer, there was little change, but those who looked deeper, and knew him more intimately, saw an added gentleness around the sick-bed, and a tenderer sympathy when they were called to yield up their loved ones to the grim messenger, whose coming, his skill, or the strong hand of love, could not stay. He was a man ever foremost in all works of charity, in public, and educational improvement (the Singleton Institute was called so in honor of him, and his untiring zeal and devotion in building it up, and making it what it was—the pride and glory of Clinton), and in everything that was calculated to advance the interest of his fellow-man. Though of strong and decided political feelings and opinions, he would not leave his post as physician, though often solicited by friends to represent their interest in the State legislature. "No," he would say, "I must care for your physical health, let some else look after your political interest, to keep a healthy body-politic; it is of more importance than you may imagine, to preserve a pure and healthy physical manhood:" and nothing could tempt him from his position.

There was another person in the Singleton household

of whom we may be tempted to say too much—one whose influence was gentle, yet all-pervading, as the perfume of hidden violets. Miss Mary Thornton was a distant cousin of Dr. Singleton's dead wife, who in his great need came to supply the mother's place, as far as she could, to his little daughters. Ada and May called her "Aunt," and really loved her as such, so gentle was she, so patient and sympathetic in all their childish joys and sorrows. To May especially, she was everything her wayward nature needed: too young to feel deeply or long, the loss of her mother, Aunt Mary soon became the object of her childish devotion and repository of her troubles. Ada, though mature and self-reliant, for her age, was still too young to be the guide of a nature such as May's, that needed firmness, united with wisdom and gentleness, to mould it into an admirable character, for May, while giving promise of unusual beauty, was wilful and impulsive, and had ever been to Miss Thornton a greater care than the more tractable Ada, but, as is the case with the wayward ones of earth, also more fondly loved. Dr. Singleton was, of course, much from home, and considered himself most fortunate in having such a woman to take the care of his motherless little girls, and preside over his home; and he always treated her with courtly deference and consideration.

At the time our story opens, Ada was eighteen; and had graduated the summer previous at the Singleton Institute, where May was still a pupil. Without being beautiful, she was very attractive—her winning manners being her greatest charm; and to those who knew her best, she was most lovable.

Robert Brent, a young medical student, completed the household at Roselawn. He was the son of a cousin and dear friend of Dr. Singleton's, who at his death (the mother had been dead some years before) requested that

Dr. Singleton would be the guardian of his son, then sixteen years of age. And as there was little besides the boy to be guardian of, Dr. Singleton took him into his family, as a son, and was educating him for his own profession, for which Robert had shown a decided inclination. He had attended one course of lectures and was already a great help as well as comfort, to his uncle—as he called Dr. Singleton, for he felt and acted as a son towards him, and as a brother to his daughters.

But for some time Robert had been aware that his feelings for Ada partook of a deeper and different tinge than was compatible with brotherly affection, and the knowledge had made him shy and reserved of late in his manner towards her, something so unusual, that it did not escape Ada's watchful eye, for she too loved Robert Brent, but with a sister's calm and holy affection; and his changed manner grieved her, as she was not conscious of having given occasion for offense.

On Christmas day Robert came in after the rest had dined, having taken a long ride into the country to visit a charity patient, and found Ada alone in the sitting-room. "It is hard, Robert," she said, "that you should have to make professional calls to-day; I think you might have eaten your Christmas dinner with us. Where have you been, and were you obliged to go?"

"Yes; for uncle or me one, and I preferred to let him rest to-day. Old farmer Bruce is very low; I don't think he will see the dawn of a New Year, poor man. But I must get my dinner, for I fear Aunt Mary is tired of waiting for me," and Robert rose to go.

"One moment, Robert—what have I done to wound, or offend you? Your manner has certainly changed towards me of late," said Ada detaining him.

"Wounded me! offended me! you, Ada? Nothing; it must be only your fertile imagination, little woman, that

sees a change," returned Robert, with a lightness he did not feel, as he stood holding the door-knob before he passed out.

"I am very glad : I thought, or imagined, if you like it better, you were different somehow, and it troubled me ; but I will not keep you longer from your dinner."

"No, no, set your heart at rest, Ada, you have done nothing in all your life to wound me ; you have always been kind," and he added to himself, as he left the room, "Only too kind, and I am a fool, that is all. I know she has not a thought of love, that is not given to Hugh, and he cares nothing for it ; but she is blind, blind !"

"O Ada ! look what beautiful flowers Mr. Hugh has sent us for to-night," exclaimed May, bursting into the room a little later, with a bouquet in each hand. "This small one is for me, here is my name on the card ; isn't it kind of him ?"

"Very kind," replied her sister with a bright smile, taking the flowers from May, and bending over them to inhale their delicate fragrance. "Did you send thanks, May ?"

"No, I did not see the servant, but here is something written on the other side of the card," and May reads—

" 'Sweets to the sweet,' you know, little May,
Fragrant heliotrope and mignonette—
To deck a graceful, woodland fay,
And modest blue-eyed violet—
'To-night we'll dance and sing so gay—
I claim you now for the *third set* !' "

"Oh ! isn't it nice, Ada ? the flowers, the poetry, and an engagement to dance, all at once, it is just like Mr. Hugh " (in May's eyes Hugh was a paragon of perfection). "But what is on your card ? please read it."

"Nothing much, you can read it for yourself, if you

are curious to know," and Ada threw the card into May's lap, with an air of indifference, as she rose to place her flowers in water, to preserve the freshness and beauty she seemed, for the moment, not to prize—and here is what May read—

“Accept this floral tribute, lady fair—
Pure white camellias for your braided hair,
With graceful fuchsias mingled here and there,
And scarlet-hued geranium brighten thro’
Its ducky sheen ;—and now I crave from you,
Your hand for the *first* set—remember ! Hugh.”

Now, although these were quite nice for impromptu lines, and the bouquet was lovely, yet Ada felt a vague dissatisfaction and disquiet—in truth, she had felt unhappy, or rather, troubled, since the day before, when she had seen, with sinking heart, Hugh's evident fancy for Elenor ; how the girl seemed really to possess magnetic power, that drew and held him near her, and with woman's intuition in such things, she felt that another (almost a stranger, and *she* had known Hugh all her life) would be the recipient of rarer flowers, and more impassioned lines. Be that as it may, neither lines or bouquet had given her the pleasure which any kindness or attention from Hugh never failed before to impart, and her forebodings, if she had them, were true ; for at the same time Patty bore up to Elenor's room a magnificent bouquet of rarest exotics, rich tropical flowers, like the Titian tints of her warm beauty, for Hugh had laid Col. Fred Stacey's hot-house under contribution, and culled his choicest pets to offer the girl, who seemed to have bewitched him.

As Elenor took them from the silver salver on which Patty bore them with great care, a deep flush of pleasure suffused her cheeks, and she exclaimed, “Oh, how lovely ! Tell Mr. Legare, I thank him very much,” and as the ser-

vant left the room, she noticed the card, and with glad, eager eyes she too read—

“Earth’s loveliest flowers an offering were too poor
To lay upon *thy* shrine, thou queenlier rose
Than ever bloomed to gladden Paradise ;—
Would I could pluck and wear thee next my heart,
My rose of all the world, my beautiful !”

If Elenor had thrilled at the mere breath of his fragrant offering, what were her feelings as she read these impassioned lines ? She hardly understood them herself, and she did not stop to question their meaning, or attempt to analyze the tumultuous throbbings of her heart, as she sat wrapt in a happy trance, with the flowers pressed in their cool fragrance to her burning cheeks, until Patty’s entrance admonished her that it was time to begin her toilet for the evening.

“Law, Miss El’n’r, time you was gitten ready shure, Mass Hugh done dressed, and makin’ Tom light de parlors, and it jes looks butiful, Miss El’n’r,” said Patty, as she proceeded to light Elenor’s lamp.

CHAPTER IV.

BUT too long have I neglected to bring before the foot-lights the noble master of Stacey Hall, Colonel Fred Stacey, bachelor, and only brother of Major Walter Stacey of Aspendale. Both these sons of the South had *earned* their military titles in her service, during the civil war, and why should they not *wear* them ! These two, and a sister, Mrs. Howard Hamilton, of Baltimore, were the only surviving members of the family, at the time of which we

write. There had been one other brother, the oldest, a wild, erratic sort of fellow, whose uncertain career had been a great grief to his parents while they lived ; but he, too, was dead, many years ago, and the family buried his faults with him, remembering only his virtues ; for he had many, and a really noble nature underlying the recklessness and seeming worthlessness of his character.

Fred Stacey was several years older than Walter, and if not quite so handsome, many liked his grave, intellectual face better, and while he was perhaps less brilliant than his brother, he was a man of deeper culture, and greater force of character. He had been engaged to Maud Legare, an older sister of Walter's wife, whom he loved with a passionate devotion, that only such strong, reticent natures as his are capable of. During the first year of the war, when he was absent in the service of his beloved South, a cruel bridegroom came and snatched her from his waiting arms.

As soon as he was informed of the illness of his betrothed, he hastened to her, but too late !—she was sleeping “under the daisies.” What he suffered as he knelt alone by that new-made grave, was known only to his God. After a short time, given to sorrow too deep and poignant for the world to understand or appreciate, he returned to the strife, not so fierce as the battle with his own heart for submission to the blow, which left its trace on all his after life ! Loving again had not entered his thoughts, and he became from that time, the quiet, reserved man we find him, caring little for society, and mingling rarely with the outside world ; but devoting his time to reading and study, and with the care of his farm, and the cultivation of flowers, he was not wholly miserable. Being considered a most eligible *parti*, Clinton was untiring in its efforts to inveigle him again into society, but with most unsatisfactory success. His sister-in-law, who had more influence with him than all Clinton combined, had commanded his appearance

at her Christmas festival, on pain of her royal displeasure, and in this instance, he was quite willing to obey.

Colonel Stacey had from the first been strongly and strangely charmed and drawn towards Elenor (there was certainly something magnetic about the girl), and since she had been an inmate of his brother's house, he had been a more frequent visitor, and they had become excellent friends, if nothing more. Elenor greatly admired, the high-toned, cultivated man, and felt herself improved, as well as entertained, by his intelligent conversation, in which his rare and varied information was mingled, with no thought or appearance of pedantry, and he loved to watch the unfolding of her quick, bright intellect as he did the opening of one of his exquisite tropical flowers, and to see her lovely face, and deep dark eyes changing with every new thought and emotion, like sunshine and shadow playing hide and seek over some gorgeous autumnal landscape. In fact, he almost began to think he might love again, and that at last he had found a woman who could fill the place of his lost Maud, in his heart. And even our grave and dignified colonel had some masculine weaknesses, for he was anxious to see if Elenor's beauty could be enhanced by evening dress, and some curiosity mingled with this, to see the impression she had made on the fastidious Hugh, for though Hugh had been to the Hall, Col. Stacey had not been to Aspendale, since his arrival, or he would perhaps have seen that the aforesaid fastidious young gentleman had already succumbed to her resistless charms.

* * * * *

Ada commenced her toilet for the evening with no very bright anticipations of pleasure; she felt that something was amiss, something had come between her and Hugh, that she was powerless to turn aside. She was not first, as formerly, when if he did not love her, he loved no one

else, still, she had never been more carefully or becomingly attired ; and when she descended to the sitting-room, where May and Robert were awaiting her—May rather impatiently, for it was her first party of grown people, they all pronounced her costume perfect. And Robert felt more than ever, as he gazed admiringly at the pure sweet girl, that his efforts to regain a calm, brotherly regard, must prove futile.

“Come, children, be off with you,” said the old doctor as he kissed his daughters good-night, “the carriage has been waiting some time—don’t stay too late, or dance too much.”

It was the first time Elenor had seen a gathering of the beauty and chivalry of Clinton and the surrounding country, for she had not been overwhelmed with invitations, or gaities, the winter being the dull season in that, as in most country towns at the South ; and Clinton being like others in this particular, that it did not run after poor governesses, however pretty. Why should it ? Human nature is much the same the world over, and toadyism has become more common in the South—to her *shame* be it said ! than before the war ; while the length of one’s purse is the usual standard by which one’s claim to attention and courtesy is measured.

As Elenor entered the brilliant rooms, leaning on the arm of Col. Stacey, there was evidently a sensation ; and low whispers could be heard about—“Who is she ?” “How lovely !” “The most beautiful creature I ever saw,” etc., and one ill-natured response, at least, from Miss Jemima Brooks—“Pshaw ! it’s only Mrs. Stacey’s Yankee governess ;” while her hopeful brother in another part of the room, said, not under his breath, “By Jove ! she’s stunning !” Mrs. Stacey was busy receiving her guests, for they were still arriving, and kept Hugh so persistently at her side, to greet all his old friends, that but for Col.

Stacey's reassuring presence, Elenor would have felt rather isolated amid so many strangers. But her graceful ease and self-possession would not have failed her in the most *recherché* assemblage, yet she had been little into general society, and still felt the seclusion of convent-life and school-girl timidity cling about her in the presence of strangers. Miss Jemima called by the more youthful diminutive of Mimy, at her express command to her friends, was not remarkable for beauty or amiability, and as each year lessened her chances for matrimony, she became more spiteful to any of her sex, who possessed the dangerous charms of youth and beauty, which she lacked. Miss Jemima had long had her aspirations fixed on Col. Stacey (she certainly did not lack ambition), but thus far with so little success, she was beginning to despair, and when she saw him enter with a lovely young creature on his arm, her last hope expired, and mental anathemas, "not loud, but deep," were poured on Elenor's devoted head. But she managed to assume an artless and youthful manner as they approached the part of the room where she was, and smiling as sweetly as her soured visage could possibly manage to do, she said,

"What a stranger you are, Col. Stacey, a sight of you is good for sore eyes—do introduce me to your friend—your brother's governess, is she not?"

"Miss Fane—Miss Brooks. Have you sore eyes, Miss Jemima?"

"Oh no! you naughty man—don't call me Jemima—you know I detest the name, call me Mimy—we are such old friends."

"Ah, I beg pardon, Miss Mimy, I will try to remember. There is the music—will you not dance, Miss Fane?" he asked, turning to Elenor as she stood amused and interested, watching the many new and strange faces around her. "May I not try to renew my knowledge of the youthful

pastime, by being your partner ? Though I fear you will find me rather awkward—it has been years since I danced.” And it was true, for since the one sweet face that made his world was hidden from his sight, and that dear form had slipped from his loving clasp, he had never asked the hand of woman in the dance until now. Elenor did not know what an evidence of her influence over the reserved and retiring man the request proved, but she replied brightly :

“ With pleasure ; I have not danced for a good while either—so we can excuse each other if we are a little ungraceful at first—though I think ‘ the poetry of motion,’ like music, is easily recalled.”

“ No doubt, by the young, but I fear my feet have ‘ forgotten their cunning,’ and feel their added weight of years,” said Col. Stacey, smiling, as he led her to a place in the set that was forming.

“ Most grave and reverend seignior,” returned Elenor, with mock humility, “ I fear so youthful a partner as I cannot keep pace with your slow and measured step—perhaps Miss Brooks would suit you better,” she whispered, with a malicious little smile.

“ Heaven forbid ! I will pay you for that, by introducing her brother ; he has hardly taken his eyes off you since our entrance,” replied Col. Stacey.

“ Which is he ? I hope he does not resemble his sister.”

“ You will have ample opportunity of judging before the evening is over, to your cost, I fear—he is a great bore.” But it was their turn to dance, and further conversation impracticable. Hugh had, as we know, to gratify his sister, already solicited Ada’s hand for the first set ; but he had mentally reserved the next for Elenor—and much to his chagrin he saw her led off by Col. Stacey without being able to secure her promise. But as he happened to be in the same set, he had the pleasure of watching her as she moved with queenly grace and *abandon* through the quadrille,

which he did with more interest than was exactly consistent with the attention due his fair partner. After it was over, many of the dancers went out on the moonlit colonnade; but Ada Singleton, being that anomaly among young people—a prudent girl, replied to Hugh's invitation to promenade:

“No, thank you—I thought *you* knew, Mr. Legare (I don't suppose Ada had ever called him *Mr. Legare* before in her life), that I never go into the night air, when heated from dancing; but do not let me detain you.”

“I ought to have remembered it, Miss Singleton,” Hugh returned, with emphasis on her name, and an amused smile, “and I can but commend your prudence. It would be wise if all young ladies would follow your example—but the men are to blame for tempting them into danger.”

“That is true; but a woman ought to know, and do, what is for her own physical well-being, in spite of temptation,” said Ada.

“Yes; but so few have your firmness and determination to do what is safest, when inclination leads into more dangerous, but agreeable paths.”

“You give me more credit than I deserve: it is entirely due to papa's rigid training on all points touching health, that it has become quite easy and natural for me to observe such restrictions; but May is not so well trained, I feel sure she is out—will you please bring her in. I saw her dancing with Mr. Gwynn, the new teacher in the high school—you do not know him? he is very nice—please go,” and as Mrs. Stacey came up at the moment to look after her favorite, Hugh went in search of May. Coming across Elenor and Col. Stacey, he stopped, saying, “Excuse me, Fred—Miss Fane, will you give me the next set?”

“I am very sorry, Mr. Legare, but I have promised it to Mr. Brooks,” who as soon as the dance was over, had sought an introduction to Elenor, and in the next breath,

asked her to dance, and as she had no excuse, she was fain to accept.

"Fie! Miss Elenor, I fear you do not appreciate as you ought, the honor Mr. Brooks has done you. I am sorry for you, Hugh, but we must hide our diminished heads, since 'Theo. comes to the fore,'" laughed Col. Stacey. But Hugh was too much disappointed to relish this gay badinage, so he passed on, and having found May, and delivered her sister's message, he lit a cigar, and strolled out into the avenue, feeling in no mood to return to the parlors and play the agreeable. Hugh was somewhat spoiled it must be confessed, not only during the life of his parents, for he was an only son, but his sister, since their death had always made his wish her law (as also did the sweet Maud, as long as she lived) and disappointment even in little things, he rarely had to endure, and while this had not materially spoiled a naturally noble and unselfish nature, yet when real trouble and disappointment should come, as come they must, at some time, in the life of even the most favored ones of earth, he might be less strong to endure and rise superior to their influence.

Theo. Brooks, with his usual practice of attaching himself to the young lady he saw was attracting most attention, his motive being generally to make himself more conspicuous, was very attentive to Elenor whenever he found an opportunity, much to Col. Stacey's annoyance, and Hugh's disgust, the former fearing the pleasure of the evening would be greatly marred, for her, by being compelled to listen to his tiresome and insipid platitudes.

The whole Brooks family were intensely vulgar, having risen since the war by sudden and doubtfully acquired wealth they were very deficient in that true refinement; which only gentle birth and education for successive generations can give. But they had managed, by a great display of their wealth, by which society is so easily dazzled, and so

soon worships, to secure the *entrée* to circles in which, if they did not feel at home, they covered the fact by a boisterous indifference and vulgar bravado. Theodore was a lawyer, by profession, and imagined that fact entitled him to the consideration of the most exclusive, and placed him at once above those outside of that learned and aristocratic calling, while his money was sure to give him favor, and secure for him a welcome, from young and old, of the feminine portion of society. But he had certainly reckoned without his host in regard to Elenor, for she listened to him with ill-concealed disgust, and a manner so *distract*, that he must have observed it, had he not been very obtuse, as well as very conceited.

Hugh had returned to the parlors in time to fulfil his engagement with May Singleton, but had not yet found Elenor free to give him the dance he coveted, when at last, finding Tom about to announce supper, he bid him "wait a moment," and making his way to Elenor's side, surrounded as she was, he said,

"Miss Fane, it seems I cannot have the pleasure of dancing with you, may I take you into the refreshment room?" and as Elenor arose with a "thank you, Mr. Legare," Tom announced in stentorian voice, "Supper ladies and gentlemen!"

CHAPTER V.

"MR. LEGARE, I hope your patience is not entirely threadbare, I could not help it—'first come, first served,' you know; but I am free, now, and at your service, if you still care to dance with me," said Elenor, as they made their way into the supper room.

“Thank heaven ! if I still care ! how can you doubt it ? as if I had cared for anything else all the miserable evening ! Will you dance the next six sets with me ?” asked Hugh, eagerly.

“As many as you like.”

“Thanks ; will you give me a waltz ? You owe me some amends for being engaged *every* time I asked you.”

“Which was not my fault, but your own tardiness—but I will waltz with you, if that will make amends—though I cannot see that I *owe* you any,” laughed Elenor, “and I am not willing to tax your gallantry too far.”

“Have no fears on that score—

I am content, whatever else betide,
To linger, blest and happy, by thy side !

You see the prospect has really inspired me to ‘lisp in numbers’—impromptu,” whispered Hugh, smiling and happy at last.

“Well, don’t forget I am mortal, and would like something more substantial than poetry,” returned Elenor, gayly, yet his low, earnest tone sent a thrill to her heart.

“I don’t believe you are mortal,” he said, as he returned to her side with a plate piled with tempting viands, “prove it, by eating all I have brought you.”

“I should indeed be more than mortal to do that,” laughed Elenor, “although the unusual exercise of dancing has given me quite an appetite.”

“By the way, Miss Fane, speaking of exercise, I hope you will keep up riding, and when I return next summer, I shall find you quite an accomplished horsewoman. It is such a graceful, healthful exercise, and our Southern women do not ride enough—or walk either, for that matter—in fact, they rarely become adepts at anything. We are the greatest people for want of thoroughness, on the face

of the earth—we always stop short of perfectness,” said Hugh, with such energy, that Elenor thought he could be very much in earnest, enthusiastic even, in any cause in which he was interested, or on any subject that he believed in.

“Are you not rather severe on the South?” she asked. “But of course you ought to know better than I—though that is not the impression my limited observation has left on me.”

“It is true, nevertheless—as you will acknowledge before you have been here a great while,” persisted Hugh. “What! not through already? I see you are catching the spirit; take care!”

Col. Stacey was evidently enjoying the evening by making himself generally agreeable—even to Miss Jemima. His was a most unselfish and chivalrous nature, that felt it more blessed to give pleasure than receive it—and many a wall-flower was made to rejoice at his kind efforts to render the occasion pleasant to them—and this was the more easily done, as he did not dance again, after the one turn with Elenor.

Mrs. Stacey sought an opportunity after supper to say a word to Hugh: “Why will you make your attentions to Elenor so marked? I am disappointed in you to-night, Hugh; you have hardly spoken to Ada,” she said, with a troubled look.

“Lilian, do let me enjoy myself in my own way. I do not think my attentions to Miss Fane have been noticed by anyone but you—in fact, I have paid her very little, have not even danced with her yet. You wish me to enjoy the party you have so kindly given for my benefit, do you not?”

“Certainly, but you know the gossiping tongues of Clinton—do be careful,” urged his sister.

“It will be charity to give them some foundation to

build on, then. Don't worry about me, Lily, I think I have arrived at years of discretion," replied Hugh, a little warmly, for he did not like his sister's attempt to control his actions; but his good-humor was soon restored, when the band struck up one of Strauss' most inspiring waltzes, and he was soon gliding with Elenor to its perfect, graceful measure. As his blue eyes looked into the soft, lustrous depths of her beautiful dark ones, and her warm breath caressed his cheek, he felt that this was indeed compensation for his waiting. Col. Stacey looked on with doubtful approval, as he saw Elenor waltzing—so unconscious of wrong, with this almost stranger, but then, *he* was rather old-fashioned in his notions, the world said; and Ada too wondered a little that this girl should do without hesitation what she had never done, though Hugh had often asked her—and she had known him all her life! Was Ada also rather prudish?

Later in the evening Hugh asked Elenor to promenade. "Get a shawl, Miss Fane," he prudently suggested, "the night air is growing more chill;" and Elenor caught up a crimson cashmere from the hat-rack, where she had thoughtfully placed it in case of need, and throwing it over her shoulders, they went out into the moonlight, to rivet more closely the chains already being woven around their hearts. Little recked they that the day would come, when their most passionate prayer would be, that they might loose those fetters without torturing pain and unspeakable agony to both. How blind we are! How little we know what the future has in store for us! But is it not best so? Who could bear life, even the young and careless, if the veil were lifted for a moment, and we could see the hideous spectres that loom on either side our life-path! Would not many timid ones start back appalled, and with rash hand seek, in death's oblivion, to avoid the trials they dare not face.

"Miss Fane, I leave to-morrow," said Hugh, as they walked slowly under the skeleton aspens of the avenue, the moonlight making a delicate net-work of shadows on the white-sanded drive beneath.

"So soon!" replied Elenor with a heart-throb. "I thought you remained until after New Year's day."

"No, I am compelled to be in Savannah on the twenty-seventh, on very important business; I did not mention it to Lily for fear of marring the pleasure of her party. Now, I hope you will not think me premature or hasty, but I cannot risk anything by my tardiness in this matter, though I may offend you. I must tell you before I go, Miss Fane—Elenor, that I love you, love you now, as I know I shall love you always. I loved you from the first moment I saw you. I am as sure of my own heart now, as I shall ever be, but you may not know yours; and I do not ask you now, if you can return that love, but I do wish you to be assured of mine, and ask you to let me hope that sometime in the future you can return it—will you not try, dear one?"

"O Mr. Legare, you cannot, must not love me! what will your sister say? Nothing but harm can come of it—your sister's governess! a waif, alone and friendless in the world! You are right to go away; go, and forget me!" All this she said with such passionate haste, he could not interrupt her; but when she paused, he led her to a rustic seat, and placing himself beside her said:

"Forget you? never. If you are alone and friendless, it is only another reason why I should and do love you, my darling, my peerless Elenor! Are you offended by my sudden avowal? And will you not bid me hope?" he asked, taking her little brown, shapely hand, and pressing it warmly in his large, fair one.

"No, no, I am not offended, but I must not bid you hope. Have I not seen that it is the dearest wish

of your sister's heart that you marry Miss Singleton? I cannot come between you," returned Elenor, the quick tears springing to her eyes at the thought of his belonging to another.

"But you *have* come between me and every other living woman!" said Hugh passionately, "and no earthly power shall separate us, if you will only love me—say that you will try."

"I must try *not* to love you, and you must forget me, Mr. Legare—and you will, it is only a passing fancy," and Elenor tried to smile and treat the matter lightly; but in her innocent "I must try not to love you," she had revealed more than she intended of her real feelings, and Hugh was not without hope as he replied:

"It is no passing fancy, as you know, and I *will not* try to forget you, for I am not bound to another, as you seem to intimate; to no other woman have I ever said, 'I love you;' and until you say to me, 'I can *never* return your love,' will I try to forget," and Hugh pressed his lips to the hand he still held clasped in his own,

"Mr. Legare, I cannot listen to you longer; our absence will be noticed, and your sister will be much displeased with me. Do let us go in," pleaded Elenor.

"Well, if we must; but we will keep this in our own hearts for the present—only for your sake, dearest; I care not if the whole world knows my love for you, I glory in it. And do try to remember, I am a free agent in loving and in choosing a wife—in this I shall consult no one; and I am bound only to you, until you say the word that sets me free. You have not said it, and you will not say it, darling?" he said so low and beseechingly that Elenor found it very hard to resist.

"O Hugh—Mr. Legare! I cannot, dare not promise; don't you see how I am situated? Everyone will be angry with me, and I shall be so unhappy. Please let us go in,"

again urged Elenor, more troubled than flattered at Hugh's sudden and unexpected avowal of love.

"Certainly ; I am at your service," he said, rising and drawing her hand through his arm, "but do not be frightened, my timid fawn, I will stand between you and all danger, now and always, my darling, if you will let me."

To this Elenor made no reply, as they were nearing the colonnade, which was filled with promenaders passing to and fro ; while gay voices and merry laughter mingled with the music, made the scene through which Elenor had just passed seem unreal and dream-like.

A little later Col. Stacy made his way to Elenor, as she sat looking rather pensive, and asked :

"Why so sad, Miss Elenor ? Has Hugh been saying anything to cause that shadow on your bright face ? If so, I will call him out, 'with coffee and pistols for two ;' you know I am your accepted champion to-night, and will do battle to the death in your cause."

"No, no, indeed he has not ; why should you think so ?" replied Elenor, trying to brighten ; but the conscious blood suffused her cheeks, and he, noting her confusion, drew his own conclusions, which were, however, rather wide of the mark ; for while he thought Hugh might have been "whispering soft nothings" into her ear, he never dreamed for a moment that he had made a serious avowal of love. Perhaps Col. Stacey forgot in his calmer years, that in youth

"There are looks and tones that dart,
Like instant sunshine o'er the heart,"

and that there is really and truly, in this matter-of-fact world of ours, such a thing as love at first sight.

"Well, I am glad my prowess may still sleep, untested," he replied gayly, "but Brooks has been searching

for you, and trying everybody's patience with the question, 'Where is Miss Fane? Can you tell me where to find Miss Fane?' "

"O, the horrid man! Col. Stacey do you believe in attraction and repulsion at first sight?" she asked.

"In a measure; but the feeling is not always a safe one to guide us in judging of character. Why do you feel a sly antipathy for Theo.?" asked Col. Stacey, amused at her look of disgust.

"He does not attract me, certainly, he is not magnetic; and I have found, in my limited experience, that my intuitions rarely deceive me."

"He finds you magnetic, at any rate," returned her friend, laughing.

"Ah, Miss Fane, happy to find you at last;" said the subject of their remarks, coming up at the moment; "you know the next set is ours," and Elenor rose to go through the martyrdom of dancing with Brooks; though almost anything was a relief from her too busy thoughts, on what had transpired.

Hugh, now that he had unburdened his heart by confession, and was nursing a new-born hope, could afford to ease his conscience, and propitiate his sister, by being very attentive for the rest of the evening to Ada Singleton.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next morning all were astir at an early hour to see Hugh off; for as we have seen, he was a most important personage in that household. Even Maud and little Wattie were up to say good-by to "Uncle Hugh," whom they loved more as an older brother, than an uncle. Elenor

knew that all the family would breakfast with Hugh, and she thought it best to join the circle as usual, and thus disarm suspicion; and if a desire to see the last of her lover was even a greater incentive to her early rising, we need not wonder.

The nearest station was ten miles distant, and as the morning train on the C—— Railroad passed at 9.45, an early start was necessary; and Major Stacey and Hugh were already seated at the table, waiting, when Elenor entered the breakfast room. She could not prevent a look of consciousness, and a brighter color coming to her tell-tale face; but Major Stacey's cheerful "Good morning, Miss Elenor, I hardly thought you would be down, after our late hours last night," served to restore her equanimity, while he continued, "And this shabby fellow does not deserve that we should all be disturbed by his untimely departure. But you are looking as bright as the goddess of morning; how did you manage it, with so little of 'nature's sweet restorer?'"

"Oh, I took deep draughts, and lost no time in dreams," replied Elenor, smiling. "But where is Mrs. Stacey? Shall I pour the coffee?"

"I think she would be obliged to you, as she is busy with Hugh's lunch; which I know will be bountiful enough for a dozen men (in love) from here to Savannah," said Major Stacey.

"You would intimate that I am in love," returned Hugh; "since when, may I ask?"

"Oh, most young men of tender years are generally in love—it is their normal condition," Major Stacey replied, laughing.

"Put *me* down as the exception to the rule, if you please," but Hugh dared not look at Elenor just then, and after a rather awkward pause, he turned to her, and said:

"Miss Fane, I hope you will not be too hard on poor

Brooks ; he is badly done for, I think, and Miss Ada will have to look after her quondam lover."

"You certainly overrate my powers, Mr. Legare—I cannot have impressed so important a personage as Mr. Brooks, surely," Elenor returned, ironically ; but Mrs. Stacey's opportune entrance put an end to this forced conversation.

"You down, Elenor ! I am much obliged to you for taking my place," she said, then turning to her brother—"Hugh, I cannot be reconciled to your leaving so soon, and so suddenly ; just think of it, Elenor, he did not let me know it until last night, after the company had all gone," and tears came into the blue eyes, so like Hugh's.

"You know *why* I did not, Lily—but let us decide about our trip for the summer ; I vote for the Virginia Springs—what say you, Walter ?"

"Very good ; I'd like to go back to the old State that bore the burden and heat of the contest, and through the long, weary years cared for our brave soldiers as tenderly as she could, without a murmur ! Yes, let it be Virginia—I should like to see my old tramping ground again, which I can do, while the rest of you are enjoying the *dolce far niente* of the Springs," Major Stacey replied, as he placed his napkin in its ring and pushed back his chair. Miss Fane, would you not like such a jaunt ?"

"Exceedingly ; do you think seriously of going, Mrs. Stacey ?" asked Elenor.

"Hugh says so, and he generally has his way," answered Mrs. Stacey, trying to smile ; "but I think it is rather early to be laying our plans."

"Hugh, is your luggage ready ?" asked Major Stacey, as he rose from the table ; "I must hurry Cæsar, you have no time to lose ; don't let him drive hard," and he and Mrs. Stacey left the room, followed by the children.

"Miss Fane—Elenor, may I write to you ?" asked Hugh,

going over to where she was, ostensibly busy plucking the dead leaves from the plants arranged on a pretty rustic stand in front of the low window, so as to catch the first beams of the morning sunshine.

“Not for the world!” she replied, with alarm. “Your sister must know if you write; do not ask it, please.”

“Give me one word of hope, then, to cheer me in my absence.”

“I dare not! I can only say, *wait*—you may change, and then—”

“Never! and you are, you shall be mine!” and before she was aware, he clasped her in his arms, and pressed passionate kisses on her lips. “Farewell, darling! forgive me, and let no other press these lips until we meet again!” and Hugh hurried from the room, leaving Elenor so amazed and confused, that she rushed up-stairs to her room, where, after turning the key, she sank into a chair and burst into tears—whether of indignation at Hugh’s temerity, or regret for his departure, she could scarcely have told.

“Where is Elenor?” asked Mrs. Stacey, as with tearful eyes, she and the children—who always made a scene when Hugh left—stood on the colonnade saying their good-byes.

“I have made my adieus to her, and believe she went to her room,” answered Hugh, with as much indifference as he could assume; but it did not deceive his sister’s keen penetration, for she said:

“O Hugh! I fear you are going to disappoint my most cherished hope.”

“Nonsense, Lily, don’t take foolish notions into your head,” returned her brother smiling; “good-by, dearest! write to me soon,” then turning to the children, “Maud, you and Wattie must be good, and love Miss Fane very much, and I will see what I can find pretty in Savannah to bring you, when I come,” this was whispered with an arm around each.

“O, we love her ever so much now, don’t we, Wattie?” whispered Maud in reply. Hugh kissed each chubby cheek, and hurried to the carriage, for Major Stacey’s, “Come along, Hugh, you’ll be too late for the train,” hastened his lagging steps; but did not prevent his casting a glance up to Elenor’s window, where he caught a glimpse of a tear-stained face, and waved a last adieu.

* * * * *

Elenor had thought little of love or marriage. Seeing nothing of the other sex in the secluded life of the convent, her mind had dwelt much less than most girl’s of her age, on such subjects; and the feelings awakened by Hugh’s unexpected avowal of love, were so new and strange, she hardly understood their meaning; though she could but acknowledge that some emotion was a guest in her heart, to which it had before been a stranger. Yet her most distinct and decided thought was, that it must not be cherished,—this foe to her peace, and disturber of the sweet haven of rest, the congenial, pleasant home, she had found. No, she would strive to extinguish the flame she knew was kindling in her heart; and she would, she must discourage Hugh!

After Hugh had gone, Mrs. Stacey occupied herself with having things restored to their wonted order; and in packing baskets of delicacies for her more humble neighbors. Tom was kept busy going the rounds; rather to his disgust at having to wait on “poor white folks,” when the village was luring him with its crowds of the recently emancipated, and its din and confusion, so dear to the African heart on that longed-for holiday, but with the promise of the whole afternoon to himself, he had to be content.

“Mrs. Stacey,” said Elenor, who was kindly assisting in the charitable work, “I would like a walk this morning, and if you approve, the children and I can take Mrs. Williams’ basket. I wish to see Winnie, any way, about the

lessons in music Col. Stacey said she was so anxious to have me give her."

"Very well; I know the children will be delighted, if you do not mind being troubled with them," replied Mrs. Stacey.

"No, indeed, I had rather have them than not; and Winnie is so fond of them."

The house occupied by the Williams family was a neat cottage on the outskirts of Col. Stacey's plantation, about half way between Aspendale and the Hall; so that the walk was not a very long one, the houses being about two miles apart by the highway. But there was a nearer way through the fields and meadows, used by pedestrians, and this walk Elenor and the children took. In the days of slavery it had been the overseer's quarters, but Col. Stacey had it repaired, a neat veranda added, and newly painted, before the Williams' took possession. And when flowers and shrubbery had been planted by Mrs. Williams and Winnie, and pretty clambering vines shaded the little veranda, and adorned many a rustic frame in the small front yard, it had been during the past summer quite a bower of beauty. They had been its occupants for a year, when we introduce them to the reader. Theirs was but the old and common story since the war, a refined and cultivated family reduced to poverty. Col. Stacey had made Mr. Williams' acquaintance not very long after his removal to Clinton (from a neighboring town) where he had hoped to improve his condition, and be able to complete the education of his two sons and his daughter; but when Col. Stacey found him out, he had exhausted the little that he had left after the expense of moving, and had been unable to get into business, and was so discouraged and despairing that he was almost on the point of suicide. Col. Stacey, by his sympathetic manner and magnetic nature, drew from Mr. Williams, in spite of himself, the recital of his troubles,

in which he was deeply interested. With him to see misfortune, and to hear of struggles with the hydra-headed monster, poverty, was to endeavor to relieve it, and he then and there offered Mr. Williams the position of steward or superintendent of his farm, in which his principal duties would be to adjust shares, keep the farm books, etc. For Col. Stacey had dismissed his overseer when the war closed, and since then had given his personal supervision to his plantation ; but now, having repaired in a great measure his losses by the war and mismanagement during his absence, he felt that he could afford an assistant, and also help a worthy man.

When he had ended his proposal, Mr. Williams was too full to speak, but as soon as he had in some degree recovered his composure, he said in tremulous tones :

“I will gratefully accept your kind offer, and may God forever bless you, for you have saved me from despair.”

Mrs. Williams was much above the ordinary woman, even of refined and educated circles ; she had been bright and pretty and a considerable belle in her girlhood ; and being tenderly nurtured and of rather frail constitution, the change in their circumstances fell heavily on her. The unceasing anxiety and wearing effort to eke out their scanty means was almost more than she could bear. And when she saw how despairing her husband was at times, and what a source of grief it was to him, that he could not afford his loved ones—herself especially, the comforts to which they had been accustomed, that try as he would and did, he could not meet his necessary expenses, and the dreaded incubus of debt was pressing him sore, and turning a naturally genial, hopeful nature, to sadness and despondency, is it any wonder that she too was fast losing faith and hope ? Poor woman ! she was so ambitious for her darlings, and to see them deprived of the advan-

tages of an education, and the opportunity to become fitted for the position in the world and society to which they were entitled by birth, was indeed a trial. But the children bore it all bravely—it is so much easier for the young to rise above misfortune—to

“Go forth to meet the shadowy future,
Without fear, and with a brave heart,”

and their cheerfulness and hopefulness was all that kept her from utter despair. She had one of those esthetic natures that rejoice in the beautiful and luxurious, and her surroundings had more to do with her happiness than she liked to acknowledge; but since their removal to the cottage where we find them, and her husband had constant employment and a fixed salary (although not very large), they had both been much happier and more hopeful. The boys, too, had good situations in a neighboring city, obtained through Col. Stacey's influence and exertions; and Mrs. Williams gave what time she could spare to instructing her daughter in her studies. Winnie was a delicate, graceful girl of fifteen, that might develop into a very pretty woman, with a more robust *physique*, but just now she was a source of anxiety to her mother, who was very fearful her darling would never be strong enough to endure poverty and hardships. Yet this frail girl was her mother's greatest comfort, and her gentleness and sweetness soothed many a bitter moment, and checked her rebellious murmurings. On one occasion, when Mrs. Williams expressed herself harshly for the change in some of her fair-weather friends, Winnie said:

“O mamma, you would not have *me* feel thus; you have always taught me to have faith in our fellow-creatures.”

“Don't tell me what I *have* taught daughter, my faith

had not been so shaken then, by the baseness of many whom I thought above being influenced by money. I fear I shall come to believe, that it is the only 'open sesame' to the hearts of most people ; and that no success or good can be attained in this world without it."

"But, mamma, it is not the 'open sesame' to the heart of our best and truest Friend," replied Winnie, gently and respectfully.

"No, thank God, it is not ; and I am in danger of forgetting *that*, my sweet comforter, but I will try not to care if all others forsake, since my darlings are left me, and the "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

CHAPTER VII.

THE next day they were all to dine at Stacey Hall, with the addition of Dr. Singleton's household. The three families had for years observed this Christmas reunion, when the old people were living ; and now Dr. Singleton was the only one of that generation left, but it was still kept up ; and this year they were to hold the annual gathering at Stacey Hall. The day was all the most exacting could desire, and Elenor declared she had never seen such skies or felt such balmy air in mid-winter.

"Surely this is the Italy of the South," she exclaimed, as they drove to the Hall. "Florida cannot have a lovelier climate ; if so, let others enjoy it, I am content with this."

"But like all lovely things, Elenor, it will not last ; we shall yet have cold and disagreeable weather enough before the winter is over to make you sigh for another Italy than this," said Mrs. Stacey. They were going quite early, as Col. Stacey wished his sister-in-law to superintend some

of the arrangements rather beyond Maumer Cinthy's skill, who was a jewel in her way, and a most excellent house-keeper for one of her race. And she was devoted to "Mass. Fred," as she still called him; and no persuasions could induce her to leave him, though several years had elapsed since the glorious (?) proclamation of freedom.

Elenor had never been to the Hall, though she had frequently noticed its beauty in driving past it, and she was charmed with the appearance of things as they drove through the lawn, still green as emerald, and studded here and there with groups of live oak, that were very grateful to the eye in contrast with the bare forest trees. As they passed into the grounds in front and wound by a circular carriage-drive amid beautifully trimmed evergreens, the white serpentine walks gleaming here and there through the shrubbery, she could but exclaim:

"Oh, how lovely! Does Col. Stacey have all this kept in such perfect order himself?"

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Stacey, "and does a good deal with his own hands, I suspect."

"It is wonderful how he can accomplish all this without the aid of woman, and her taste," returned Elenor.

"Yes; but I think his taste in everything quite as refined and exquisite as a woman's. There he is ready to welcome us."

"What a lovely place you have, Col. Stacey," said Elenor, as he helped her from the carriage; "the presiding genius of such a paradise should be a woman. I fear you cannot appreciate it so entirely as one of my sex would."

"Miss Fane, will you be kind enough to accept the position?" he asked smiling, and bowing low before her.

"No, indeed; it should be some rare divinity to grace all this loveliness; I should not like being eclipsed by my surroundings," she replied gayly.

"Elenor, I think you are caught in your own trap,

though I must admit your *finesse* in getting out of it is worthy of a Machiavelli," laughed Mrs. Stacey.

"I shall not let her off so easily," returned Col. Stacey, "but I am glad, Miss Elenor, you like the paradise of which you so coolly refuse to be the presiding genius. I hope to show it you in all its summer glory ; it may be you cannot still be obdurate."

"Perhaps not ; I will wait and see ; do not accept my decision as final," laughed Elenor, as she tripped lightly up the broad stone steps that led to the spacious portico.

"I will not," he said earnestly, as he ushered them into his pleasant library. "Welcome to my *sanctum*, Miss Elenor, as its presiding genius, if you will."

"Col. Stacey, I wish I had not made that unfortunate speech," replied Elenor pouting charmingly, and really beginning to feel annoyed at his raillery.

"Why, my dear young lady, do not regret it ; I have long been of your opinion, and after kindly suggesting an improvement in my *menage*, you will not assist me in carrying it out ; that is cruel," and he smiled mischievously at her evident confusion.

"Hush, Fred ! and stop teasing Elenor. Come, I am at your service," said Mrs. Stacey, as she left the room. The children had been taken off by Maumer Cinthy, to be petted and fed with dainties from her pantry, and there Mrs. Stacey found them.

"Forgive me, if I have offended," Col. Stacey lingered to say, and bending with courtly grace he took her hand and touched it lightly with his lips. "Let us be friends, Elenor."

She looked up brightly, every trace of annoyance gone, and replied, "I was foolish to feel worried at a jest that I had myself provoked. Col. Stacey, I have no one now to correct my faults. Oh, how I miss dear Sister Florine ; will you not take her place, and be my mentor ?"

“Rather a dangerous position for a bachelor ; but I will be more generous than you, and accept without demur,” he replied kindly. Elenor, safe from all danger herself, in her preoccupied feelings, never for a moment dreamed there could be any, to a man of Col. Stacey’s age, in this intimate and constant association with one so young as herself, for with all her rare personal loveliness, she was not the least vain ; so she smiled contentedly as he left her, and turned to explore the well-filled book-shelves. She had already seen many specimens, for Col. Stacey had often sent and carried her books, selected by his mature judgment, as best suited for a foundation to a course of reading he had kindly offered to mark out for her. She had read few novels, and those only such as Sister Florine had approved ; and she had begged Col. Stacey would not taboo them entirely. “Certainly not,” he had said, “a good novel occasionally is an advantage ; they are the flowers in the otherwise too sombre field of literature, or the delicate dessert after more substantial food ; but you must promise to read only those I select.”

“I promise,” she had replied, “but don’t make them too much like angel’s visits, or I may rebel.” Elenor soon spied “The Initials,” and seating herself in the recess of the window, merely to look over it, she was soon absorbed in the interesting story of German life and customs. How long she had been thus engaged, she did not know, when a step and a voice aroused her. “Where is the child ? I left her in here, Elenor ! she must have gone out into the shrubbery.” But just then Elenor rose and said :

“Here is the *child*, Col. Stacy, at your service.”

“Ah, how you startled me ; I was so sure there was no one in the room. Excuse my calling you child, I am your mentor now, you know. But what have you there that has kept you so quiet ?” taking the book from her

hand. "A novel! and you did not ask my permission to read it," he said gravely.

"No, but I intended to do so, and only meant to look over it; but before I was aware, I became so interested that I forgot I was breaking my promise in the letter, if not in the spirit. But I may read it, may I not?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes; there can be no objection to this," he answered, all displeasure vanishing from his fine face at her explanation, "though it has been some time since I read it. But come into the drawing-room a moment; I want to show you my mother's portrait, which I think you resemble very much." They crossed the wide hall, and he led her into a handsome room, elegantly furnished, though in not very modern style, as since his boyhood nothing had been altered or added. His sister-in-law had often begged him to refurnish it, but he said: "No, if I ever marry, it will be time enough; if not, this suits me very well, and is valuable from association."

"What do you think of it?" he asked, as he threw open the blinds, and a flood of light streamed in on the picture.

"Oh, it is beautiful! Surely I cannot look like that," exclaimed Elenor.

"I think when you are older you will be even more like than now," said Col. Stacey, looking from her flushed, eager face to the portrait; and back again into the soft, lustrous up-turned eyes. "This was painted by Sully, when he was in his prime, and my mother was in her matured beauty. She went to Philadelphia for the purpose, and I have often heard my father speak of the sensation her beauty created, and how many visited Sully's studio to see the beautiful Southerner, after the portrait was completed. But there is Walter, let us see what he thinks of it. Good morning, Walter; come in here a

moment. Do you see any likeness in Miss Elenor to our mother's portrait?"

Major Stacey looked from one to the other several times before he replied, "I do, most decidedly. I have always thought she resembled some one I had seen, and it puzzled me to think who, but now the enigma is solved. Where is Lily, what does she say?"

"Go find her Walter, and let us see if she can discover it; she is in the dining-room I expect," said his brother.

"This is a sweet face, Col. Stacey, who is it?" asked Elenor turning to another.

"That is our only sister, Mrs. Hamilton, of Baltimore. She resembles our father. That is his portrait, opposite my mother's; also painted by Sully, at the same time. Walter and I are said to be more like our mother."

"Yes, I think you are," assented Elenor.

"You might sooner be taken for her daughter than Ellen. Well, Lily," as Mrs. Stacey came in followed by the children, who were curious to see what was wanted with their mamma, "we want your opinion. Walter and I see a wonderful likeness in Miss Elenor to our mother's portrait, what say you?" and again was the young governess subjected to the critical glances, under which she was growing a little nervous, for the thought rushed over her, almost like an inspiration, "May I not be more nearly related to these people than they dream, or would like? I must have relations somewhere; and then the name (which they do not know) and the resemblance, which is certainly strange." But her mental soliloquy was interrupted by Mrs. Stacey's reply:

"I do not see that it is very striking; there is perhaps an intangible something of resemblance in the two faces, but it is difficult to locate, and I should not have discovered it if the idea had not been suggested."

"O Lilian! how blind you are," exclaimed her hus-

band, "it is so very apparent; the more one looks at the two, the more the likeness grows on one."

"One's imagination, perhaps, Walter," returned his wife, "but I know Elenor is tired of your scrutiny, and this cold room; let us go into the library and have some music. I wonder why the Singletons do not come; they are very fashionable for a family re-union. But I hear a carriage now," looking out of the window; "yes, there they are at last," and Mrs. Stacey went out to welcome the tardy guests.

"What a pleasure, Dr. Singleton, to see you and Aunt Mary, too. Come into the library and take Fred's easy chair in the corner, and let me pet you to my heart's content to-day; it seems an age since I have enjoyed that privilege," said Mrs. Stacey.

"Yes, child, as much as you please, I feel just in the humor to appreciate it; and—" he added as the ladies came in, "I do not get much now; Ada and May are thinking more of beaux, than petting their old father," said the old doctor facetiously.

"Fie, papa!" exclaimed Ada, "you should not slander your own daughter. Col. Stacey, will you not defend me against the outrageous charges of my unnatural parent?"

"I am sorry to say I cannot conscientiously do so, Miss Ada," replied Col. Stacey, smiling.

"Oh, you ungallant host! how can you think a woman would waste her thoughts on such 'flat, stale, and unprofitable' subjects? Elenor, will you not say a word in defence of your sex?"

"I did not think any were accused but you and May, and I have too much respect for your father's opinion to differ with him," laughed Elenor.

"Will nobody help me!" said Ada, in mock despair. "Never mind, papa, I'll be even with you—Mrs. Stacey did you know Miss Jemima was going to be your neighbor?"

"Hush, daughter! I'll take back every word; she never

thinks of sweetheart's, Lily. Oh no, she is to be my old-maid daughter, and pet and coddle her old father," said Dr. Singleton, eagerly.

"No, papa, I shall leave that to Miss Jemima now ; I should hate to deprive *her* of the pleasure she so much covets."

"Ada, if you mention that woman's name again, I'll cut you off without a shilling," returned her father, laughing in spite of himself. But Ada would not spare him, for she knew her father was more in earnest than jest, in deprecating any allusion to Miss Jemima, for that lady had, in her despair at not securing a more youthful husband, been turning her attentions and efforts towards the old doctor, much to Ada's amusement, who had teased him before now, until he hated the sound of her name.

"Col. Stacey," she went on, "you can rest in peace now, Miss Mima has thrown you over (I hope the fall will not prove fatal), she aspires to the dignity of step-mamma, and papa is fast yielding to her charms." Of course, the tables were entirely and successfully turned on the old doctor, and the Stacey brothers laughed as long and as loudly as was consistent with the respect due their old friend and guest.

"Lily, you see I have no authority in my own family, even Aunt Mary is laughing slyly, and approving in her heart, Ada's heartless retaliation on her old father," said Dr. Singleton demurely.

"What could I do, cousin John ? you brought it on yourself," replied gentle Miss Thornton.

"But why did you let Hugh go, Lily ?" continued Dr. Singleton, "he is the only absent one in our re-union, except Ellen, and she has long ceased to form a part of it."

"I did my best to keep him doctor ; he pleaded an important business engagement, as an excuse for leaving so soon," Mrs. Stacey replied.

"Ah, it is sad to see how one and another drop out, and the circle grows smaller, year by year. I shall be the next link in the chain to break," said the old doctor sadly.

"Pooh, doctor, you are good for many years yet. I should not wonder if you doted Lily's and my grandchildren." returned Major Stacey cheerfully,

"No, no, Walter, that is impossible; but I am not murmuring at growing old, on the contrary,

'One sweetly solemn thought
Comes to me o'er and o'er:
I'm nearer my home to-day
Than I've ever been before;
Nearer that bound of life
Where we lay our burdens down;
Nearer leaving my cross,
Nearer wearing my crown,'"

repeated the good man reverently. And a solemn silence fell upon the little circle, so gay before, which Mrs. Stacey broke by saying:

"Elenor, we will have that music now, and Ada and May can join you in the singing."

"Col. Stacey, will not you and Dr. Brent lend your aid?" asked Elenor, as she seated herself at the piano. "I know you add music to your many other feminine accomplishments, do you not?"

"I have been forced, in the absence of that 'presiding genius,'" said Col. Stacey, with a meaning smile, "to cultivate some of the 'feminine accomplishments,' as you are pleased to term them; though I was under the impression that the greatest masters in music have been men; and I do not know that there was anything especially feminine about Mozart, Handel, Mendelssohn, etc., unless the refining influence of the divine art made them more gentle and tender in their natures, than others of the sterner sex."

“I am more than convinced. Spare me!” laughed Elenor; “it is cruel to demolish me with my own weapons. But I am ready; what shall we sing?”

* * * * *

“Dr. Singleton,” asked Col. Stacey, when they were at dinner, “do you discover any likeness in Miss Elenor to our mother? You remember her when she was young; and Walter and I think Miss Elenor very much like her portrait, which you know was painted when she was about thirty.”

“Yes,” replied the doctor unhesitatingly, pausing in his discussion of the tempting dessert, and calmly surveying Elenor, who was sitting nearly opposite him at table; “and I am glad you have given me the solution to the strangely familiar look that has haunted me whenever I have seen Miss Elenor. She is very much like what your mother was when your father brought her here, a young bride, from Virginia; and I must say, Miss Elenor, she was the most celebrated beauty in all the country-side. But you know the old adage—”

“Certainly, doctor, and I am not vain enough I hope, to imagine myself as beautiful as the original of that portrait must have been; but I am glad, at least, to remind you all of one so loved,” said Elenor modestly.

“Perhaps you are a relation, without knowing it. Where were you born, and what was your mother’s maiden name, my dear?” he asked.

“I do not know. I was too young when I lost my parents, and was placed in the convent, to remember anything; and the mother has persistently withheld all knowledge of them and my birthplace from me. But I believe I was born at the South, for since I have been here, it seems to me I have faint recollections of its sunny skies, balmy air, and lovely flowers, like some half-remembered dream, or something known and loved in a former state of

existence," Elenor replied, her face and eyes glowing at the bare possibility that her intuitions might some day prove to be inspirations.

"And I'll wager anything you are right, my dear; one has only to look at you, to know you were born beneath Southern skies. But my dear child, I should demand, as my right, all she knows in regard to your antecedents," said the old doctor with energy.

"Ah, doctor, you do not know the mother, or you would not say that; I think even Sister Florine is somewhat afraid of her—I know she received letters from my guardian, but of their contents I was never informed, not even a message to say he remembered my existence. I cannot imagine her motive for such reticence in all that regards me."

"She has a motive, you may be sure, and not a good one either. I would compel her to reveal all she knows," replied Dr. Singleton.

"How could I? I would write to my guardian, but I do not know either his name or address; and when Sister Florine—who has been my good angel—on my leaving the convent, demanded my guardian's name and address, she as angrily and absolutely refused her, as she had me, saying he did not wish either known by me, or anyone else, for the present."

"Well, it is astonishing! I would appeal to the courts," urged the indignant doctor.

"What could a poor lone girl like me expect to accomplish? No, I am only too glad to be free; and I fear such active proceedings might place me again in her power, which I deprecate above all things. She said she would inform my guardian that I had left in defiance of her approval, but I don't believe she has done so, or he is very indifferent as to my movements, for he has given no sign that he has been enlightened. But I am too

happy now to think or care much about the matter, and shall wait patiently until he chooses to reveal himself."

Elenor had never said as much about herself before; and, with the innate delicacy of refined people, the Stacey's had never questioned her about what she did not voluntarily communicate, but Dr. Singleton's age and the conversation which had grown out of the tantalizing resemblance, gave him license, which was certainly not idle curiosity or vulgar inquisitiveness on his part; and all were interested and sympathetic listeners to the facts elicited by this accidental conversation.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in the land." No more beautiful or striking description of the joyous advent of Spring can be found than this, from that "song of songs" by Israel's wisest king, and, also, sweetest poet! And how like a refrain the words rang in the ears of sweet Winnie Williams, who had read them for her morning lesson, and now, as she busied herself among her flowers, and heard the "singing of birds" in every tree and shrub, impressed themselves on her mind with new beauty and significance. It was a lovely April day that seemed to mock with its brightness and gladness the sad occasion for which it had been set apart, for it was the twenty-sixth—memorial day, and Winnie was gathering flowers to weave into garlands to decorate the graves of the dead soldiers. There was to be an

address at the village, by young Temple Gwynn, and Winnie was going with Mrs. Stacey and Elenor to hear it; and though she had no loved one among the fallen brave, yet she wished to offer her tribute of gratitude to those who had died so nobly in defence of her country and theirs.

Winnie had been made very happy by the opportunity of taking lessons in music from Miss Fane, and Col. Stacey had insisted on sending the piano from the Hall to the cottage, as he said it would be useless for her to take lessons if she had no ~~instru~~ment, and when Mrs. Williams objected to being laid under such deep obligations, replied, "Why it is rusting out for want of use, and I shall be the one obliged, by Winnie's using it; and when you marry, little girl, I will give it to you as a bridal-present," he said, laying his hand caressingly on Winnie's nut-brown hair.

"Oh, Col. Stacey, I shall wear it out before then," laughed Winnie. And not only in this instance had she been the recipient of Col. Stacey's kindness, but many a mysterious gift, dear to a young girl, found its way into her possession — while she did not find it difficult to guess who was the generous donor.

Col. Stacey had also insisted on paying Elenor for Winnie's lessons, but she refused decidedly to be compensated, saying: "Do let me have the pleasure of doing a little good in the world, when you have the opportunity of doing so much," and he was forced to yield; for he knew from his own experience, how far better it is to *give* than to *receive*. And Elenor had learned to love her bright, gentle pupil very much, and her untiring industry and rapid progress made it indeed a pleasure, rather than a trouble, to instruct her. As for Winnie, she fairly worshipped Elenor, and honestly believed that there could be no other two in the world, at all comparable to her

and Col. Stacey. She said to her mother one day: "Mamma, I don't know how Miss Elenor and Col. Stacey can help loving each other, they are both so good and noble; and I do believe he loves Miss Elenor, but I think she only loves him as a dear friend." We shall see how far Winnie was right.

And how had Elenor spent the dreary months that were now past? for there had been many a gloomy day, with cold and rain enough to make even our bright, cheerful heroine long for the Spring-time; and the thought would intrude—"He is coming with the summer—hasten, hasten, summer days, and bring my love to me!" But much of the tedium had been relieved and brightened by Col. Stacey's presence, and when the weather would permit, he would insist on Elenor's going out on horseback, and would himself accompany her. And as the Spring advanced, many a little excursion and impromptu party was he instrumental in getting up, mainly for her pleasure, for Elenor had her whole afternoons and Saturdays free from school duties, which but for the efforts of this kind friend must have passed rather wearily.

Elenor's was a grateful loving nature, and she could but grow to prize very dearly the friendship of one so every way worthy, and who seemed to study only her happiness and pleasure. Col. Stacey knew there was danger to him in the society of this bright, joyous young creature, but still he braved it, and would bring his offerings of rare flowers, entertaining books, and such cheerful, intelligent conversation, that he was always welcome.

Mrs. Stacey said she did not know what had come over Fred, she never saw a man so changed, and would say she believed it was all owing to Elenor's influence; and in her heart she was glad, for she hoped that matters would so arrange themselves that there would no longer be any danger to Hugh. She had believed for some

time that Fred was doing all he could to win Elenor to love him, and she never dreamed for a moment, that a poor friendless governess could refuse so eligible a *parti*, as Col. Stacey certainly was. Beside she did not know that Hugh was already beyond her influence, and her scheming, or that 'her governess' rebellious little heart was filled with the image of her handsome intractable brother. But so it was, for Elenor's love, from its very repression and concealment, had grown and strengthened until it pervaded every fibre of her passionate nature—that all her life had had so few objects on which to lavish its pent-up wealth of tenderness and devotion.

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"Miss Elenor, I call Gwynn's effort a fine thing of the kind," said Col. Stacey that afternoon, when they had returned from the village, where they had seen the last of the sadly-pleasing honors paid to those whose blood had been poured out, as they believed, on the altar of liberty. I have always thought, as he does, that there is a great deal of mistaken philanthropy in erecting costly monuments to our dead soldiers, whom it cannot benefit, and perhaps leaving their wives and children to suffer, if not to starve—not but what I think the dead should be honored, but that I think it of such infinitely greater importance that the living should first be cared for. This struck me as especially fine; I think I can repeat it. 'I speak,' he said, 'with a voice too low to be heard beyond to-day. My words are too humble to live longer than the setting sun; but if I could speak with a voice that would ring through all the years, I would plead for a visible and lasting token of your respect and love for the families of the dead men buried here; and while you tell to the world your sorrows, your love, your unchanging faith in them, remember it is a ghastly mockery, a shivering ghost of sentiment, if you fold your arms in scorn, and harden your hearts against the wail of their

widows and the cry of their orphans. You rear costly stones above the father's grave, while the children have not where to lay their heads. You scatter garlands of bright flowers over the soldier's tomb, while the hearts and lives of his loved ones may be Saharas, barren and cheerless, gladdened by no flowers of love or charity. You sound brave music around these mounds, which may grate harshly on the poverty-stricken lives of the living. You build here annually your mausoleum of love and praise, while away yonder stands the wretched shanty of the soldier's widow, serenaded by the winds, and deluged by the driving rain ; and year after year your orators let fall silvery sentences in the midst of children orphaned, uneducated, and uncared for.* Now, that is what I call eloquent, and true as eloquent. I had no idea Gwynn was such a sharp fellow. I tell you it beats any memorial address I have heard from older and more celebrated orators."

"Why, Col. Stacey, I do believe you have repeated it *verbatim*," exclaimed Elenor, "how on earth could you remember it? Yes, I quite agree with you, it is fine ; but I knew Mr. Gwynn was very smart—you know he and I are great friends."

"No, I did not know you were such *very* great friends. I hope it is nothing more than friendship, eh, *ma belle*? And *that* is rather a dangerous sentiment between two interesting people of opposite sexes. Who is it says friendship is love fully fledged and ready to fly on the first fair day?"

"I do not know, and I do not believe it. I think there may be pure and sincere friendship, without a thought of love ; and I think there is another sentiment that is often entertained between persons of different sexes, that is even more nearly akin to love, yet is not, and never

* I am indebted to a young friend for this quotation, which I think deserves to be written in letters of gold.

could be love—‘a sentiment too tender for friendship, too *spirituelle* for affection’ as somebody else says. And I believe it possible, for I think my feelings towards Temple Gwynn and his for me are of that nature,” said Elenor earnestly.

“My dear young lady, do not deceive yourself, such a feeling is a dangerous guest, and will turn to love some fine day and fly away with you and Mr. Temple,” returned Col. Stacey, really concerned, for he did not think his favorite, his special pet and darling (he knew now she was becoming this to him) entertained even so warm a feeling as this for any man, and it sent a thrill of fear through the strong, reserved heart of our noble colonel; and I do not know but he might have then and there put his fate to the touch to win or lose it all; but Mrs. Stacey came out just then—they were on the colonnade—and said:

“Elenor, I think you and Fred had better come in, the air is growing chill, and tea is ready—you will stay, Fred? Walter will be in when the bell rings. Fleet, Wattie’s greyhound hurt her foot someway; Walter thinks a snake must have bitten her, and he is making Cæsar bathe it with arnica.”

“No, Lily, I must go; Chester is champing his bit impatiently now, thinking of his oats. Good evening Miss Elenor, don’t forget our ride to-morrow afternoon. Good night Lily, tell Walter he can send for those cotton seeds in the morning; I told Williams to let the servant have them.”

Just then the tea-bell rang, and Mrs. Stacey and Elenor went into the dining-room, as Col. Stacey cantered down the avenue, regretting his sister-in-law’s inopportune appearance.

CHAPTER IX.

MAY, fairest, sweetest daughter of the jocund Spring, had almost passed away, in her tender grace and beauty, before Col. Stacey had again resolved to end his tantalizing hopes and fears. "I will know the worst or the best," he said to himself on this soft, love-inspiring day, as he sat in dreamy idleness at his favorite window, looking out towards the roof-tree that sheltered the lonely girl to whom his heart went out with a strange, inexpressible yearning, he thought was love. "I know," he mused, "my feelings differ widely from those I cherished for my lost darling, but then a man can only experience that sort of love once in his life, and I love Elenor as much as I shall ever love again; and if there is a good deal of the fatherly element in my affection, that is owing, doubtless, to the difference in our age. She is so lonely and unprotected in the world! I long to shield her from its coldness and indifference, and from that rascally guardian; and I will do it, too, if she will let me! How she would brighten my lonely home, and grace it, too! She is a born lady—no mistaking that; and what do I care for the mystery of her birth?"

With Col. Stacey, to decide was to act; and that afternoon he found himself at Aspendale with an object in view. After sitting awhile on the colonnade with his brother, Elenor came out, and he asked her to walk with him; which was no unusual occurrence, and did not excite surprise either in her or Major Stacey. She willingly assented; and after tying on her garden-hat, which hung in the hall, he led her towards the family burying-ground, by a pretty, shaded walk through the grove. Elenor had often walked

there by the same path, but never before with him. It was a sweet, retired spot, awakening sad but pleasing emotions, rather than a feeling of dread and repulsion, and she knew well each quiet resting-place of the silent dead. But the one that always possessed for her the greatest interest and attraction, was a tall white shaft, with its broken, half-blown lily bud, so exquisitely carved that Tenerani might have envied the obscure artist, who seemed in this "magic crystallization" of nature, to have caught the highest inspiration—the divine afflatus—of art. Often had she stood beside it, her eyes scarce seeing its pure, exquisite beauty, for the tears that filled them as she thought of her—

"The fair and *debonair*, that now so lowly lies,"

under the green mound—the gentle, lovely Maud Legare.

Straight up to this Col. Stacey led her, and seating her on a rustic bench in front of it, took his place by her side. After a little silence, he said :

"Elenor, here sleeps the love of my youth and earlier manhood. I loved her as I think few men love in this world ; but she was too pure for earth, and God took her to a more congenial clime. Since then my life had lost its charm. I never thought to love again, and my aim has been so to live that I might meet my darling in that 'better land,' where there is no parting." He paused, overcome by his emotions. Elenor was deeply touched, and said softly :

"I am very sorry for you, Col. Stacey, but you should not let this loss spoil your whole life ; is not that wrong ?—is it not murmuring against God ?"

"Yes," he replied, regaining his composure, "I have murmured, and suffered my selfish repinings to isolate me too much from my fellow-creatures. But that is past, I am happier now than I ever thought to be again in this world, and to you, dear Elenor, I owe the change ; you have

brightened my life more than I can tell you, for you have taught me that I can, that I *do* love again—if not with the fervor and intensity of youth, still with true and deep devotion. For thus do I love you, dearest, and it is in your power to restore my lost happiness, and renew the hopes of my earlier years. Will you do this, Elenor—will you be my wife, sweet one, and brighten my lonely home for me?” and he drew her gently within his encircling arm, but Elenor was too much astonished to resist, or to reply.

“Will you not answer me, Elenor? Can you not return my love?” he asked again.

“Oh, Col. Stacey! I never dreamed of this; I never thought you cared for me in that way. I am very, very sorry—for I cannot be your wife,” she said at last, and leaning her head on his shoulder, she burst into tears.

“Hush, hush! do not weep; but why cannot you be my wife? Cannot you love me well enough? Am I too old and ugly? I had fondly hoped you were learning to love me a little, dear Elenor.”

“I do—I do,” she said, eagerly, “very much, but not in that way—not as a woman should love the man she marries. I hope it will not grieve you much that I cannot; you have been so good to me, and I feel like a most ungrateful wretch to give you a moment’s pain. Oh, forgive me!” she pleaded. He did not answer her; he was trying to summon all his fortitude to bear this second blow he saw was falling.

Col. Stacey was not a vain man, but he knew he was still comparatively young and fine-looking, and he had striven to win Elenor’s love, and had failed. Why? Did she love some one else? After a little, he said:

“Child, there is nothing to forgive; ‘is human love the growth of human will?’ And I must try to love you only as a dear little niece, since you will not suffer a nearer and dearer love.”

Oh, how I wish you were indeed my uncle—may I not love you as one?" she asked, looking up into the grave, kind face, and smiling brightly through her tears.

"I 'ask for bread, and you give me a stone;' but I suppose I shall have to be content with that," he answered, not very joyously.

"Oh, I am so sorry; please don't look so sad, or you will make me really unhappy," returned Elenor, her face growing serious again.

After a rather uncomfortable silence, in which Elenor caught absently at the slender, graceful branches of a weeping willow that drooped over them, and Col. Stacey made hieroglyphics, with the end of his cane, on the sanded walk, he said suddenly:

"Elenor, will you answer me one question? I know I have no right to ask it—but for my own healing, tell me—Do you love another?"

"I do, Col. Stacey, but ask me no more."

"Half confidence is no confidence, Elenor; tell me all—I can bear it; is it Hugh? and has he told you that he loved you?"

Elenor crimsoned a little as she replied, "Of course he has, or I should not permit myself to love him, at least, I should not acknowledge it to anyone. Col. Stacey keep my secret, you have forced it from me; and I would not have Mrs. Stacey know it for the world!"

"You may trust me, Elenor. Well, as I am not to be anything dearer, make me your father confessor, and tell me all about it. Was it while he was here, or has he written?"

"It was the night of the Christmas festival."

"He was in a hurry, certainly, and determined to forestall any other claims to your regards. Are you engaged to him?"

"No; there is no formal engagement. In fact, I gave

him very little hope, for I did not know my own heart then ; besides, I feared his sister would condemn such a step, and I did not like the idea of a clandestine engagement ; so I have tried to forget him, but I cannot. I would not even let him write to me, and—he thought it very hard,” said Elenor, with crimsoned cheeks, and downcast eyes, at thus being almost compelled to divulge her sweet cherished secret to another.

“ You have acted nobly, and it will all come right ; *you* must be happy, dear child, and I, who have borne so much, can surely bear this,” Col. Stacey replied, with an effort to seem cheerful.

“ Say that you will not mind ! that you do not care, my dear, kind friend. I am so sorry to wound you !” exclaimed Elenor, earnestly.

“ I cannot say that with truth yet, but resignation will come with time. Give me a kiss to heal the wound you have made. I don’t think Hugh would object, and I don’t care if he does ;” and Col. Stacey drew her to him, and pressed his first kiss on the pure, sweet lips of the lonely orphan he would have shielded from every care, in his strong protecting arms ; the first kiss of many that he took unrebuked from those same lips—but that was long afterwards. And in that future, how he rejoiced that events had been shaped and overruled by a merciful guiding Hand that cannot err.

They walked home almost in silence, Elenor thinking of Hugh’s last request, “ Let no man press these lips until we meet again ;” but she was comforted by the thought, that if he knew the circumstances under which it was permitted, he would forgive her. Col. Stacey had been such a true, untiring friend, and she was so sorry to give pain to the noble, generous heart. But even she did not know all it had cost him to give her up, for he had, for her sake, concealed much of the disappointment it was to him. He left

her at the door, with a kind "Good evening! don't worry, it will all come right, after a while;" and turned his face to his lonely home—more lonely now that this cheering hope was shattered and dead; and he must again take up the tangled web of life, with its dull warp still unbrightened by the golden woof of woman's beauty and woman's love!

CHAPTER X.

STRONG as Col. Stacey was—and he was stronger, as well as nobler, than most men—still, he was human; and he shrank from meeting Elenor again, until he had conquered somewhat this love, that would not at once subside into mere friendship and calm affection. But there was no tinge of bitterness or resentment towards the girl he had failed to win, and he resolved still to be her friend, and champion, if needed; and as a first step—and because it would divert him from his own disappointment—he decided to make a long contemplated visit to Savannah, and learn for himself if Hugh's love and intentions were genuine and serious. For he determined, if he could not win her, no other should trifle with her true, honest heart. So next morning Maumer Cinthy was quite upset, when he ordered her to pack his valise, and get things in readiness for his departure; and during the day he sent a note to his sister-in-law saying he would take any letters or packages she might like to send to Hugh. But Mrs. Stacey and Elenor had walked to Roselawn soon after dinner, and Ada would not suffer them to return until after tea; so when they reached home Elenor went up to her room at once, and did not hear the news until next morning at breakfast, when Mrs. Stacey said:

“Elenor, did you know Fred had gone to Savannah?”

“No; when did he go?” she asked, in surprise.

“This morning; I found a note last night, when I returned, telling me he was going, and offering to take letters or packages to Hugh. Walter and I have been wondering what could have taken him off so suddenly.”

“You saw him last, Miss Elenor,” said Major Stacey; “did he mention his going to you?”

“No, he did not,” replied Elenor, with a slight increase of color (Elenor blushed very easily), “but is it so unusual a thing for him to do?”

“Not at all: he frequently visits Savannah—but generally speaks of it several days before; it is only his sudden determination that puzzles me. I’ll ride over and see Williams, Lily, perhaps he can throw some light on the matter,” said Major Stacey, as he rose from the table and left the room.

Mrs. Stacey’s keen eye had noted Elenor’s confusion and guessed its cause; and she said, as she followed her into the hall: “Come into the sitting-room, Elenor, it is some time before school hour,” and when she closed the door, Elenor knew what was coming. “I do not mean to force your confidence, or pry into your affairs, my dear, but did not Fred propose to you the other evening, when you went for a walk?”

“Mrs. Stacey,” replied Elenor, with dignity, “I do not feel at liberty to divulge what is another’s secret, as well as my own, if it were so.”

“Pshaw, child, it is all in the family, and of course Fred will tell us; but I believe you rejected him, and that is the reason he has left home. Now, my object is not idle curiosity, but to advise you in the matter, if you have been mad enough to refuse him; but, surely, you did not?”

“I did, Mrs. Stacey, since you will know,” said Elenor, striving to be calm and respectful under this catechising.

“Child ! do you know you have thrown away the best chance in the State ? You are certainly blind to your own interest ; why, Fred could marry any girl in the country—but why did you reject him, may I ask ?”

“Because I did not love him, Mrs. Stacey, as I must love the man I marry,” again Elenor answered obediently.

“All romantic nonsense, child ! you ought to love him ; how could you help it, when he has been so kind to you ? I am astonished !”

“I know and feel all you can say on that score, Mrs. Stacey ; and that is what made it very hard to refuse one I esteem so highly, and who has been such a true, good friend : but I could not wrong him so much as to marry him without the highest love of which I am capable.”

“I must say, Elenor, you have done a very unwise thing—such offers as Fred Stacey are not to be had every day ; he is the noblest man I ever knew, and would make any woman happy. I cannot understand it—unless you love some one else.”

“I know how good and noble he is, and how worthy any woman’s love, and I hate to seem such an ungrateful wretch.” Here Elenor broke down and cried a little, ignoring the latter part of Mrs. Stacey’s remark.

“Well, don’t cry, Elenor ; I only hope you may not live to repent it. I can but feel provoked that you will not see and appreciate the advantages of such a marriage” for a poor governess, Mrs. Stacey could not help thinking, but she was too well bred to say so ; and she was forced to end the interview, not much wiser than before, as to *who* Elenor did love. But she knew she must have left the convent “fancy free,” then who could it be but Hugh ? Not Temple Gwynn, she was sure. Poor woman ! she saw her castle dissolving in air, in regard to Hugh and Ada, and we must forgive her if she felt a little hardly towards Elenor, that she could not take Fred, and end her fears at once and forever.

"It was not a happy day for the young governess—the children had never seemed so stupid, or the monotony of the school-room so irksome. She was troubled that Col. Stacey had taken her refusal so much to heart, that he felt it necessary to absent himself awhile from her presence; and she could not help thinking, "perhaps I have been foolish, as Mrs. Stacey says; how do I know that Hugh loves me still; it may have been but a passing fancy, that he has e'er this forgotten? And it is surely better to be the mistress of Stacey Hall, than a poor governess; and I know Col. Stacey would devote his life to making me happy; besides, if Hugh is still faithful, we shall have no end of trouble. They will all hate me for coming between him and Ada; but how can I give him up to *her*, my bonny, blue-eyed lover? I cannot, *cannot* do it!" And so Elenor's thoughts wandered from her duties, and she was sad and preoccupied, longing for the hour of release, when she might be alone.

"Mamma," said Maud, when they were at last free, "Miss Elenor has been real cross this morning. Hasn't she Wattie?"

"Y-e-s," replied Wattie, rather reluctantly, as though he were not exactly sure; but having admitted so much, he continued more confidently, "And I don't love her any more, and I'm going to tell uncle Hugh, 'cause now it's her ain't good to us."

"Hush, my pets, I expect you have been naughty; and perhaps Miss Elenor has something to trouble her that you do not understand," said their mother, a little compunctious, as she thought of their morning interview, and felt that the young girl was not so much to blame, if she could not love Fred; "but then, if she would *only* not love Hugh, I could forgive her."

"I expect she has, mamma, for she looked sorry about somethin', and I saw her wipin' her eyes; she's *always*

sweet and good before—you know she is, Wattie,” Maud replied, with the quickly changing mood of childhood; and already repentant, for her harsh accusation. “Let’s go and get her a pretty bouquet, Wattie,” she continued, “you know she loves flowers.”

“Well; and I do love her, Maudie, and I won’t tell uncle Hugh, ’cause maybe he won’t give us them pretty things he promised,” said the more calculating Wattie, whose views and opinions always took their tinge and bias from his sister’s.

As the children returned ladened with Mrs. Stacey’s choicest roses, they met their teacher at the door equipped for a walk. “Oh, thank you! Maud and Wattie,” she exclaimed brightly, “they are very sweet, but I am going out now; I will put this lovely *de Malmaison* in my brooch, and you may run up stairs, and see how prettily you can arrange the rest in my vase, by the time I return.”

“Yes, Miss Elenor, we’ll fix them nicely. Come along, Wattie,” said Maud diverted from her usual desire to accompany her teacher; and which Elenor generally gratified, but this afternoon, she wished to be alone in her walk and quiet her perturbed feelings; and thinking also that a sight of Mrs. Williams and Winnie (who always welcomed her so heartily) would aid this consummation, she took the little footpath that led to the cottage. The afternoon was charming, and the fragrant woods and meadows so peaceful—even the song of the birds, and the soft tinkle of the little brook, and the pleasant sunshine, had something inexpressibly soothing and *restful*, as well as cheering, to her sad heart. Elenor’s temperament was one of those that are much affected by the depressing or enlivening influences of nature, and all this sweetness and beauty of the May stole imperceptibly into her soul, and she was comforted. When she reached the cottage, her bright “Good afternoon!” had much of the

clear, merry ring of her usual greeting, in its tone ; and Mrs. Williams replied :

“ I am very glad to see you, even more so than usual, if that is possible ; for I am feeling rather blue to-day, and you always cheer me up somehow—Winnie, dear, put that rocker by Miss Elenor’s favorite window. See how pretty everything is looking, and you have not been here for so long !”

“ No ; I told Winnie to tell you I was very busy. I’ve been trying to get through with some rather heavy reading and study I had marked out to be finished before the lazy summer days come. But this is beautiful !” looking out of the window. “ What a magician Spring is, and how lovely the Hall looks now ; everything clothed in green and brightened by this soft sunshine ! But why are you troubled, especially to-day, Mrs. Williams ? I fear I shall prove but a Job’s comforter ;” and Elenor turned her gaze again into the room, and her eyes lingered lovingly on her favorite gentle Winnie.

“ Well, you know,” replied Mrs. Williams, “ I’ve been scrimping and saving to give Winnie the advantages of one year at the institute, and had hoped so much she could enter this spring (you know she cannot go in winter) but find, I shall have to give it up, and it is such a disappointment. I ought to be content if she can be fitted by your kind instructions, to teach music, but there is so much more that she ought to learn, and I have grown so rusty in my text-books, that I am not competent to instruct her in many of the higher branches. I thought her brothers might be able to aid us in sending her, but they write, that it takes every cent they can make to pay board and clothe themselves decently—they are just beginning, you know, so I shall have to study anew that hardest of lessons to poor human nature—woman’s nature especially, ‘ to labor, and to wait.’”

“Yes, it is hard, I suppose, but there are many things that you are *not* called to bear, dear Mrs. Williams, that you would find harder than not being able to send Winnie to school,” replied Elenor cheeringly, as she softly stroked Winnie’s delicate little hand, as she held it in hers.

“Yes, that is true, I know, returned Mrs. Williams, “but I am often tempted to believe with a dear, good aunt of mine, who lost nearly everything by the war, and said to me in speaking of her reduced circumstances, ‘Lucy, poverty is the greatest curse that can befall one in this life’—they had been wealthy.”

“I do not agree with your good aunt. That it is a great misfortune, I’ll admit; but not the greatest, by any means. Why just think of it, disgrace, dishonor, crime, loss of loved ones, any of these are far greater calamities than loss of fortune! And none of these have you had to endure, dear Mrs. Williams; but suppose God had taken your husband, or one of your dear children instead of your property, which could you have given up most cheerfully?”

“Oh, my dear, don’t mention it! take all—everything but spare my heart’s treasures, would have been my prayer. No, thank God! He has left me my dear ones, and no taint of dishonor or dishonesty clings to my husband or sons! Yes, I have much to be thankful for—still to feel that you are ignored on account of poverty, by those who are your inferiors in birth and culture, is hard to bear.”

“But those who ignore you, simply because you are not rich, are not worth regretting, that is the way I feel about it; and you know, I am only a poor governess, who has to work for a living,” replied Elenor.

“Ah, child, you are young and pretty, everything falls lightly on the young. And you have not children to be educated and fitted for the position in society to which they are entitled, and which only education can give them, since our riches have taken wings.”

"I tell mamma, Miss Elenor, that as for my education, I can read and study at home ; and Col. Stacey is so kind in giving and lending me books, that I can easily make up for the deficiency if I will, and I mean to try," said Winnie bravely.

"Certainly you can, Winnie, and I am glad to hear you speak so hopefully. All the education one gets at our best schools is of little use without the self-improvement which is gained by after reading and study. I know this, by my own experience, and you can become sufficiently well educated without entering a school-room again, if you will pursue the plan you propose ; but I must go, it is getting late."

"By the way, Miss Elenor, did you know Col. Stacey had gone to Savannah ?" asked Mrs. Williams.

"Yes, he sent Mrs. Stacey a note to say he was going. Do you know how long he will be absent, Mrs. Williams ?"

"Only a week or two, I think he told Mr. Williams. But must you go ?"

"Yes, it is time, I think. Come, walk a little way with me, Winnie."

"Come often, Miss Elenor, you've done me a world of good ; I always feel brighter after your visits," said Mrs. Williams.

"Thank you ! I will. Good evening !"

CHAPTER XI.

HUGH LEGARE was sitting in his office, smoking a cigar—for it was after his early tea and hardly dusk yet—and puzzling his brain over a knotty law point, bearing on a case he had in hand, when the shrill whistle of the A—— and

S—— Railroad reached his ears, and by some law of association, his thoughts flew with telegraphic swiftness to Aspendale and to the girl he loved—to the sweet, stolen kiss, and the tearful face as he caught a last glimpse of it, and that he longed so intensely to see again. Not that he had not thought of that same fair face every day since they parted; but to-night it came to him with a thrill, that the time was drawing near when he hoped to look into those sweet, dark eyes again, and read an answering love to that which filled his own soul; and as the weary mariner more eagerly yearns for a sight of land as he draws nearer and more near its lovely beckoning shores, so did Hugh yearn for a sight of the sweet face that had bewitched him. He shut his book, and throwing back his head, with its golden locks, that Elenor thought so beautiful, closed his eyes and gave himself up to pleasant dreams. A heavy step on the stairs roused him at last, and without ceremony the door was thrown open; it was already ajar, and looking up he saw Col. Stacey. Bounding from his chair, he grasped his hand with a "Hello! Fred, did you drop from the clouds?"

"No; I came (not) by chance, the usual way," replied Col. Stacey, demurely.

"Have a chair. Well, I am glad to see you, at any rate—left all well, I hope? Have a cigar—real Havanas; rather expensive for a poor lawyer, you will say," rattled Hugh, in the exuberance of his joy at seeing his friend, for he was sincerely attached to the grave, elderly man, of whom he stood a little in awe as well.

"Yes, I left all well," replied Col. Stacey, lighting his cigar. "I came off rather suddenly—did not think of coming until the day before I left."

"May I flatter myself that your anxiety to see me brought you, or more important business?" asked Hugh gayly.

"Both; I wished to see you especially, and to divert

my mind from the greatest trial I have had for a long while."

"Have you proposed to Miss Jemima and been rejected? You do look a little used up, since I have time to observe you."

"No, I have not proposed to Miss Jemima, but I have proposed to Miss Fane."

"The thunder you have!" exclaimed Hugh, looking the picture of astonishment.

"Yes; have you any objection? What is it to you, pray?" returned Col. Stacey.

"I have; most serious objection. And it is everything to me, at least her answer is. What was it, may I ask?"

"What do you suppose it would be to a man of my many attractions, personal, mental, pecuniary, etc.?" replied Col. Stacey, willing to tease his successful rival a little.

"Fred! you are torturing me needlessly—in heaven's name tell me; my life's happiness or misery hangs on your reply."

"Is that so? do you also love her Hugh?"

"As my own soul—tell me!" reiterated Hugh.

"Are you perfectly sincere in your intentions, and do you intend to marry her in spite of opposition?"

"What in the deuce is the use of all this catechising, Fred, if she has accepted you?" said Hugh excitedly.

"Well, she has not accepted me; she shows extremely poor taste, and confesses to a most decided preference for—you!"

"Thank heaven! I thought I could not be mistaken in the hope that I was not indifferent to her, though she would not say it, in so many words, but I read it in her sweet eyes," returned Hugh, with evident relief and triumph.

"Now you know my business in Savannah, Hugh, to

learn from your own lips if you still loved Elenor and were honest in your intentions towards her ; for though I am a rejected suitor, I am still her friend, and will not see her trifled with."

"Give yourself no uneasiness, Fred, she is the one woman in the world to me. My love was of sudden growth but it took deep root, nevertheless, and I had been counting the days, until I could go and learn more certainly her feelings in regard to me. Mine have not changed—I shall love Elenor Fane forever !"

"Forever is a long word, Hugh ; but since you have inspired a kindred feeling in her heart, I am glad it is a genuine article in your breast, and not the sham which passes with many under the name of love," said Col. Stacey.

"I am sorry for *you*, Fred, for I know to my cost, Elenor Fane is a girl to inspire no evanescent passion in a man, but I hope it does not hurt you much, old fellow," said Hugh, now able to be generous and sympathetic since *his* fears were removed.

"Nothing, since your dear sister's death, has cost me such a pang ; but I resign her to you more willingly than to a stranger. I fear you will find it difficult to reconcile Lily."

"Yes, I shall meet opposition, I feel sure, from my sister, and therefore from Walter ; you know how *her* heart is set on my marrying Ada. But I shall consult my own happiness, of course ; still, when the time comes to tell her (which is not yet, so I hope you will not hint such a thing, only for Elenor's sake, however), I may need your influence with her."

"I will do all I can ; what I desire above everything is her happiness. I believe she loves you ; and to promote your union is to secure that ; but remember, Hugh, let no trouble come to her through you," replied Col. Stacey, Elenor's happiness still being paramount with him to every-

thing else, and an unspoken fear intruding that Hugh might not strive so earnestly, as he would have done to secure this, when once she was safely his.

"Never ! dear friend ; I shall cherish her as my life, if I am fortunate enough to win her ; and no shadow, you may rest assured, that I can dispel, shall ever darken her sunny face or render sad her sweet, soft eyes. O Fred ! she is so lovely, and I'd give ten years of my life to see her at this moment !" exclaimed Hugh.

"I believe you, my boy, and I will do all I can to remove obstacles, when you need me. Good night ! I shall be quite busy to-morrow ; but will drop in again in the evening, perhaps."

"Do so, and let me see as much of you as possible while you are here."

Col. Stacey had really learned all he wished to know, and was fully convinced of Hugh's sincere and honorable intentions with regard to Elenor, but still he lingered, reluctant and fearful to return and face his disappointment. He did not know, until he had heard Hugh's confession, that there had lurked a faint ray of hope in his heart, that, after all, Hugh might not be serious—that it was only a passing fancy, awakened by Elenor's beauty, but now forgotten, and that still he might by his devotion, win her, in time to love him, when she found Hugh faithless ; but this too had faded and died, and he buried it where he had many a dead hope in the past, and vowed anew to be a friend to the lonely orphaned girl.

Two weeks had passed, and Col. Stacey determined he would waste no more time in useless repinings, but return to his home and to his duties, for he really could not enjoy his enforced stay in Savannah ; why prolong it ?

"Hugh" he said, just before he left, "write to Elenor, and I will deliver it into her hands myself, so Lily will sus-

pect nothing ;” and Hugh was very glad to send a word of love and assurance of his constancy to Elenor ; and when Col. Stacey turned his face homeward, the loving missive went with him that was to cheer the girl he had sought to win—in vain !

CHAPTER XII.

THE evening after Col. Stacey returned home, he decided to walk over to Aspendale. Passing right by the cottage, he called to speak to Mrs. Williams and his little favorite Winnie, and there encountered Elenor, who had not been unmindful of Mrs. Williams’ earnest entreaty to “come often.”

“I am very glad to meet you, Elenor,” he said, “for I was going over especially to see you ; as well as to deliver Hugh’s numerous messages to Lily, and this package to the children.”

“Thank you, Col. Stacey, I hope you have enjoyed your visit,” replied Elenor, hardly knowing what she said, in her surprise and confusion at meeting him so unexpectedly, for she did not know he had returned. “I suppose you left Mr. Legare well ?” she added.

“Yes, quite well, and very impatient for July to come, and that jaunt to the Virginia Springs, on which his heart is set ; he begged that I would try and hurry up matters.”

“I think Mrs. Stacey is already making preparation for it, and will not need hurrying up ; she wishes to leave by the first of July, she says.”

“You were just going, were you not ? We can bear each other company,” said Col. Stacey.

“Yes ; but do not let me hurry you, I can wait.”

"No, I only called to bring Winnie this music," he said, handing the young girl a roll of music; "several of the songs I heard, they are very much the rage in Savannah, and very pretty."

"Oh, thank you, Col. Stacey," exclaimed Winnie, "you are always thinking of something to give me pleasure."

"Nonsense, child! what have I done, that you should accuse me so unmercifully," laughed Col. Stacey.

"Ah, you think I do not know where all the mysterious gifts that reach me come from, but I do, notwithstanding you try so hard not to let your left hand know what your right hand doeth," returned Winnie.

"You are very kind, my little friend, to put down to my credit the gifts of some of your anonymous admirers, perhaps—how do you know? Well, you can try your music now; I am at your service, Elenor."

Col. Stacey and Elenor took their way across the fields and the meadows for some time in silence; both were painfully conscious of their last meeting, though each in their kind consideration for the other, endeavored not to appear so. At length he said:

"Elenor, have you no word to ask about the man you love?"

"Oh, Col. Stacey, do you not know that I wish to hear all you can tell me?" returned Elenor, the conscious blood dying her cheeks with a rosy flush, and her heart trembling for fear, that after all, Hugh may have forgotten her, and Col. Stacey is going in kindness to tell her so.

"What will you give me for a letter from the presumptuous young gentleman?" he asked teasingly.

"Oh, anything you may demand, to the half of my kingdom," said Elenor, laughing lightly, but really intensely anxious. They had reached the brook by this time, and he said:

"Here, sit on this mossy rock and wait for me," taking

the letter from the breast-pocket of his coat (think of the magnanimity of the man—to carry next his heart the letter of his rival, to the woman he loved !) and handing it to her. “I see Williams in the field with the reapers, and wish to speak to him ; I will not be long,” and with his usual delicate tact he left her alone to read the precious missive he had brought her. Elenor was soon devouring with flushed cheeks and wildly beating heart, Hugh’s words of love and constancy, sufficiently earnest and impassioned to scatter to the winds all her doubts and fears forever !

There were tears in her eyes, happy tears, when Col. Stacey returned to her side ; and she lifted her face to his, eloquent with the emotions that thrilled and pervaded her whole being.

“What ! tears ! are you sorry to find Hugh is really faithful and true ?” he asked, smiling kindly down upon her, and taking her hand to assist her to rise.

“No, no, you know I am not ; they are tears of gratitude ; everybody is so good to me, and I, a poor friendless orphan, am so blest ! and not the least of my blessings is your goodness to me, dear friend,” said Elenor, as they slowly pursued their walk.

“Pooh, child ! goodness, indeed ! I am your self-appointed guardian, you know ; and I was determined, in my new capacity, to find out the young man’s intentions, and have no trifling with my ward,” said Col. Stacey lightly.

“One may choose a guardian at my age, may they not ?” asked Elenor, smiling ; “and so I *choose* you, to take the place of the mythical one whom the Mother speaks of so vaguely and mysteriously, if you will hold the position until—”

“Until Hugh takes it from me,” laughed Col. Stacey. “Yes, I have served you in various capacities—friend, mentor, lover, and last, but not least—guardian : which I accept on one condition—you must obey me ; and I now

command you to write the poor fellow a few cheering lines, and I will see them posted, safe from dangerous eyes."

"I cannot promise obedience in all things, but in this instance I am only too willing to obey. Oh, my dear friend! I shall never prove ungrateful, I trust, for all your kindness," said Elenor, fervently; but they were nearing the colonnade, where Major and Mrs. Stacey were sitting, and the latter said as they approached:

"Why, how on earth did you two get together? Have you been to Savannah for him, Elenor?"

"Certainly," replied Elenor, laughing.

"Well, Fred, you come as mysteriously as you go—I must say in all your life I never knew you to go off in such a way before—not a word of warning to anyone! What has come over you?" continued his sister-in-law.

"Did you want me to advertise my departure in the *Clinton Chronicle*, Lily? I thought that would be done for me—if the editor has failed to notice so important an event, I will stop my paper."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Major Stacey. "Lily, I think you ought to know Fred by this time, but I see you do not, and your woman's curiosity will have to 'suffer and be strong,' until he chooses to reveal the mystery, and put an end to your torture; but sit down, Fred, and tell us all about Hugh and Savannah."

In the meantime, Elenor had slipped off to her own room, that she might be alone with her sweet joy and certainty, and read again and again Hugh's tender, loving words.

"Well, one thing, Lily, Hugh begged I would insist on it that you be ready to start for Virginia by the first of July; can you?" asked her brother-in-law, as he seated himself in a large rocking-chair that always sat on the colonnade, and the children called "uncle Fred's chair," and was always by common consent yielded up to him.

"Yes, I think so; but Fred, *do* tell me what took you

to Savannah so suddenly ?” said Mrs. Stacey, drawing her chair nearer and leaning on the arm of his as she asked the question—the answer to which she already knew, or surmised, to her own satisfaction. But she wanted the way opened to speak of his unsuccessful suit with Elenor, which she dared not mention until he had broached the subject, knowing his reticence on all that concerned himself ; and while she loved and revered her brother-in-law, too much to fear him, still she also stood a little in awe of him, and would not have offended him for the world. So she was fain to possess her soul in patience on *that* subject, while Col. Stacey replied : “ Business, Lily, of several kinds, and a desire to see Hugh.”

“ Fred, you are so unsatisfactory ; well, tell me if you think Hugh has gotten over his fancy for Elenor. I was very uneasy last winter when he was here, but I have concluded it was not serious ; am I right ?”

“ How should I know, Lily ? I am not Hugh’s confidant ; he did not *volunteer* a confession of the state of his affections to me ; no doubt he will to you, at the proper time, if it be that he is in love,” said Col. Stacey.

“ Fred, I believe you know more than you will admit ; and I think you are really unkind not to satisfy me,” returned his sister-in-law, drawing back as though offended.

“ Pshaw ! Lily,” put in her husband, “ don’t worry yourself, or Fred ; you will know it soon enough for your peace, it seems, if it is so.”

“ Oh, Walter, you and Fred—and fate, I fear—are all in league against me ! I know there is trouble and disappointment in store for me. Well, one thing, I wish Elenor Fane had *never* come to bring this on me !”

“ Lillian !” said Col. Stacey, as sternly as he ever spoke to the sister of his lost love, “ for my sake, never say that again.”

“What is Elenor to you, Fred, that you should care so much?” retorted Mrs. Stacey.

“I will tell you what she is—a woman whom I have loved, aye, love still, as I never thought to love again, and she is one whom even *you* may feel proud to call sister. Now, you know, it is painful for me to hear you speak in that way of her. If you care for me, try to think kindly of *her*—good night!” and Col. Stacey rose and walked quickly away, not heeding his brother’s

“Don’t go, Fred! come back and stay to tea.”

“Yes, do, Fred! I’ll never say another word,” Mrs. Stacey called after him.

“Not to-night, thank you! I must go—have letters to write,” answered Col. Stacey, without pausing in his walk.

“Well, Lily, I hope you are satisfied; you have seriously offended Fred, I fear, and uselessly. Why will you worry about Elenor and Hugh? You know if he loves her and wishes to marry her, you could not prevent it, for Hugh has always done as he pleased, and it is too late now for you to desire or seek to control him, if you had the right or power,” said her husband, as the tea-bell rung, and they rose to respond to its summons.

“I cannot help it,” she returned, “and I do not care, if that is to be the end, I *shall* be sorry; how can Fred be so unreasonable as to expect me to be glad to have Hugh marry a girl of whom we know literally nothing, and who does not herself know anything of her parents, family, or birthplace?” And Elenor’s bright face and happy smile, as she took her place at the tea-table, did not serve to allay Mrs. Stacey’s suspicions, or soothe her ruffled feelings.

CHAPTER XIII.

“So you and May are going to Virginia, Ada,” said Robert Brent, a few days after Mrs. Stacey had wrung a reluctant consent from Dr. Singleton, that his daughters might accompany her. Ada was in the yard, among her flowers, as Robert stopped to speak with her, in the evening dusk.

“Yes, I suppose so. Lily has overcome papa’s scruples, by promising to take good care of us, and not suffer us to be spirited away by some watering-place adventurer, or otherwise disposed of;” replied Ada, as she plucked a beautiful cloth-of-gold bud, and handed it to Robert.

“Thank you, Ada, I will keep it for your sake; it is not often you give me even a rose-bud. I am thankful for small favors, you see, from you,” returned Robert, “and Ada, I must know one thing before you go—is there any hope that you can ever love me? You must know—you must have seen, that for a long while, I have loved you with more than a brother’s affection; tell me, dear, can you return it?”

“Never, Robert! save with a sister’s love, such as I have always given you. I am very sorry this should have happened; everything was so pleasant before, and now, you will dislike me,” replied Ada, much worried to find that Robert entertained such feelings towards her, and that the smooth, calm current of their lives, would henceforth be troubled.

“No, I shall not dislike you, dear—I could never do that, I think; and I really had very little hope, for I

have long seen that your love was given to one who does not appreciate it, and who loves another."

"Robert! how dare you say this to me? What reason have I given you to think so, and what right to say it, even if you thought it true?" returned Ada, crimsoning with indignation and shame, that her carefully hidden secret had been discovered, and Robert had dared to reproach her with it.

"Forgive me, Ada, and excuse the jealousy of a man who loves you truly, and is deeply wounded at its rejection," replied Robert earnestly.

"I forgive you, Robert, but never hint such a thing again." And Ada turned away, and entering the house, went straight up to her room. She locked the door, and throwing herself on the bed wept convulsively; not so much that she knew it was true, what Robert had said, but that she had been weak enough to let it be discovered. She almost felt she could hate Robert for his jealous penetration, gentle and amiable as she was. "Oh! why am I so weak when I know Hugh loves another! and yet I had learned to love him long ago, before *she* came; when I at least hoped to win his affection, and now; when hope has fled, how can I tear his image from my heart, when each year since our childhood has stamped it more indelibly." Poor Ada! poor girl! we can but sympathize with her. It is very easy to say a woman should not love until she knows herself beloved—it is unmaidenly, immodest! But when a man says, "I love you," hers must be ready to spring, Minerva-like, full-grown from her heart! Bah! such cold-blooded philosophy may do for spinsters, but for the youthful and warm-hearted of the softer sex, it is not so easy in practice as theory.

* * * * *

Mrs. Stacey would have been glad if Elenor could have

been left out of their summer tour, yet she was really too kind-hearted, and too little of a skilful diplomatist to manage it without seeming unkind to her young governess, whom she liked well enough in every other capacity, but that of a rival to her favorite ; and so Elenor had to be given the option of going or staying ; and as the question happened to be discussed when Col. Stacey was present, and Elenor hesitated, from an intuitive feeling, that Mrs. Stacey would be glad if she declined, he settled it for her very decidedly, and his sister-in-law tried to hide her chagrin.

“Of course, Elenor will go,” he said, “where would she stay ? And I am sure after nearly a year of the exhausting labors of the school-room, she must need recreation more than the rest of you. I am her guardian,” he smiled, as he looked at Elenor, “and particularly desire she should see something of the fashionable world.”

“Thank you, for your kind wishes for my pleasure, Col. Stacey ; but I can stay with Mrs. Williams, as well as not ; she has very kindly offered to board me during Mrs. Stacey’s absence, and I should be very happy with her and Winnie,” Elenor hastened to say.

“I do not doubt it, my dear, but as your guardian, I insist on your going, and I hope you will not oppose me in the first important request I have made in my new capacity,” returned her friend.

“No, if you really desire it, and Mrs. Stacey does not object, I will go,” replied Elenor, for at heart, the young girl longed to be one of the party, and she knew that Hugh certainly expected, and wished it ; in fact, had written of her going as a matter of course, and how could she disappoint him ?

“I not only desire it, but command your compliance,” laughed Col. Stacey, “so that settles the matter ; and Lily, of course, must be glad to have so agreeable an addition to her party.”

“Certainly, Elenor. I never thought of anything else, but your going,” said Mrs. Stacey ; which was true, for she had not seen exactly how her *wishes* on the subject could be accomplished.

The next day Elenor received a check for two hundred dollars, enclosed with these words—

“Accept this trifle, with the earnest wish that its expenditure may give you as much pleasure as the bestowal gives
“YOUR GUARDIAN.”

Col. Stacey could not be induced to make one of their party, even Elenor’s influence and urging failed to move him. He could not yet trust himself to witness with calmness and indifference her and Hugh’s happiness in each other’s society. And the gay world had little attraction for one of his quiet and retired habits ; besides, he hoped to be cured of his “folly,” as he termed it, before Elenor’s return, in thinking of her as Hugh’s betrothed. Though in his desire to have Elenor go, he had thought far more of her pleasure than of his own healing ; and he believed both would be secured by her visit to Virginia.

CHAPTER XIV.

NOTWITHSTANDING Hugh’s impatience, it was near the middle of July before Mrs. Stacey felt that she was ready to leave for the Springs, and she almost regretted she had not accepted Aunt Mary’s proposal to leave the children with her. But they begged so hard to go, and their father sided with them.

“Lillian,” he urged, “I know you will be miserable, and make me so, if those children are left behind ; you

will imagine a thousand accidents have happened to them each day, and the comfort and pleasure of our trip will be marred entirely ;” and Mrs. Stacey knew it was true, so the children had to be fitted out with new and handsome wardrobes, and Maumer Betty taken along to look after them. But at last they were off. Hugh joined them in Augusta, and he and Elenor met, in a crowd of curious lookers-on ; but the warm hand-clasp, and quick, electric love-glance, expressed volumes of unuttered emotion quite intelligible to them, if not to the ignorant observers.

“I thought you people would never get off,” said Hugh, when they had changed cars and settled down, Maud on his lap, and Wattie kneeling on the seat beside him with an arm round his neck. “Why didn’t you leave the small fry at home, Lily ? I thought you had decided to do so, which would have been wiser in my opinion.”

“Walter was so opposed to leaving them, and they so crazy to come, I could not find it in my heart to deny them,” replied his sister.

“Well, youngsters, you’ve got to behave, I tell you now,” said Hugh, trying to look very formidable at the unwelcome and unexpected addition to their party.

“Why, Uncle Hugh, we knows how to be good when we go visiting, don’t we Maudie ?”

“I do, Wattie, but you know mamma has to speak to you sometimes,” replied Maud.

“Company manners, eh ?” laughed Hugh ; “I am glad you brought them with you, Wattie, it is more than some children of larger growth do. By the way, Lily, there are two friends of mine aboard, from Savannah, that I wish to introduce to you — Dr. Towns and Mr. Kennon ; they have relatives in Virginia, whom they are going to see, but expect to spend some time at the Springs also. Miss Ada, you and Miss Fane may begin your conquests at once, before you reach the great battle-

field ; this little side skirmishing will sharpen your weapons."

"Thank you, Hugh, we wait with impatience to see if they are foemen worthy of our steel," laughed Ada.

"Yes, I should like to test *my* powers, before a decisive battle," said Elenor, "as my weapons, I fear, are rusty from long disuse."

Hugh smiled at her, incredulous, as she knew, while he replied : "You both shall be gratified ; make ready your batteries. I will bring them in at once, before the cars are in motion. May, I shall be left to your tender mercies, I suppose, until Stacey Hamilton supplants me."

Our party found Dr. Towns and Mr. Kennon quite an acquisition in every way to their number, for they were cultivated and refined gentlemen, and both possessed in an unusual degree, those qualities essential in the make-up of a pleasant travelling companion. Taken all together they were such a merry and distinguished looking crowd that they quite eclipsed all the other passengers on board, and were "the observed of all observers." When the train had been under way some time, and the rest were fixing themselves comfortably for a nap (the other gentlemen had betaken themselves to the smoking-car) before reaching the junction, Hugh made it convenient to remove Maud, who was asleep with her head on Elenor's lap, and taking the place by her side, said :

"At last, my darling, I may have a word with you ! I was so fearful you would not come, dear, and then nothing could have forced me to take the trip ; I should have turned my back on the whole thing, and sought out your retreat," and Hugh, by some sleight-of-hand trick, known only to lovers, soon possessed himself of Elenor's trembling hand, which he clasped with passionate fervor, as some relief to the intense longing he felt to clasp her in his arms and kiss the sweet, smiling lips that were now his *very own* ; and

though Elenor was thrilling under his loving glance and touch, she answered calmly :

"I really ought not to have come, Mr. Legare ; do you not think it foolish for a poor governess who is in vigorous health, to spend all she has made in ten months, at the Springs in two, merely for pleasure ?"

"Under the circumstances, I do not. You will not need it when you are my wife ; and I wanted you to see something of the world, my little nun, and of other men, that nothing may be wanting to test the strength and depth of your affection for me, darling," returned Hugh.

"And suppose, Sir Vanity, I should fancy some one else more, after seeing the world, as you term it ?" asked Elenor gravely.

"Very well ; if you do not prefer me to the whole masculine world, were it at your feet, throw me over ; it would be hard to bear, I confess, but I wish you to be able to say from your heart,

‘ I would rather share
His lowliest lot—walk by his side, an outcast—
Work for him, beg with him—live upon the light
Of one kind smile from *him*, than wear the crown
The Bourbon lost !’

Am I exacting ? Can you say this, dearest ?" and Hugh stole an arm round her, in his persuasive, caressing manner, that was difficult to resist ; but Elenor smiled roguishly, as she answered :

"Now, perhaps ; but ask me when I have seen ‘ other men ;’ I may answer differently ; I fear there is danger ; Mr. Kennon’s dark eyes have warned me of this already."

"Don’t jest, darling ! it is too serious a matter for that ; I think it would kill me if I should lose you now."

"And do you think there is no danger, Hugh, of your fancy wandering from a little rustic like me, to some of those proud Virginia beauties ?"

"None in the world, my queen, my peerless darling ! Do you not know I speak truly ?"

"I will answer you when you too have passed the ordeal by which I am to be tried," replied Elenor.

"I have seen as much beauty in Georgia as Virginia can boast, and only at your feet have I laid the love and worship of a heart undivided and untouched before by the love of woman."

"But, Mr. Legare, we shall have such opposition ; your sister will never consent to your marrying a poor girl, whose birth and family are shrouded in mystery."

"I should like to please Lily in my choice of a wife," replied Hugh, "but I had infinitely rather please myself ; and as to the mystery of your parentage, that will doubtless all be explained ; if not, what do I care ? Don't let that trouble you, dearest." Hugh had taken a tiny box from his coat-pocket, and lifting from its soft, satin-lined bed a beautiful cluster diamond ring, he slipped it gently on the forefinger of the hand he had held a willing prisoner.

"These are what you were born to wear, my darling, and shall, if I can bestow them."

"O Hugh ! I'd rather not wear this now, your sister will suspect something, and all the rest," said Elenor under her breath, and looking apprehensively to where Mrs. Stacey and Ada were apparently unconscious of this little by-play ; but they gave no sign, and Elenor reassured, looked down again at the glittering bauble that seemed to scintillate with a thousand brilliant rays in the dim lamp-light.

"Well, let them," returned her lover, "it must be known sooner or later, and I'd rather make your fetters a little more binding before you are exposed to the danger of being drawn away from your allegiance."

"But I will promise to be so faithful and true, if you will not ask me to wear this symbol of my bondage until

we return to Aspendale, please, Hugh," pleaded Elenor smilingly.

"Of course, if you wish. You can put it in your pocket and transfer it to the deepest depths of your trunk, if you choose; but I think it very strange, if you care for me, that you are so averse to having our engagement known," said Hugh rather moodily.

"Do not look so solemn, my lord, it is yours to command and mine to obey," whispered Elenor; "I will wear it and brave all, if you insist on it—only smile on me again, dear Hugh."

"I do insist. I am tired of all this concealment, and shall tell Lily as soon as I can have a word with her alone. I know she will not show displeasure, if she feels it—she knows me too well, and loves me too much for that. I have only kept it from her on your account, not my own."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the stopping of the train, and the entrance of the conductor, who announced, "Junction! ample time, ladies and gentlemen, for supper." The rest were soon roused, and leaving Maurer Betty to take care of the sleeping children, they all went in to supper. Elenor had slipped on her glove to hide the tell-tale ring, and as they were at table, Mr. Kennon, who had taken his place by her side, observing it, said:

"Miss Fane, you have plenty of time to remove your other glove; are you not afraid of soiling it?" and guilty, blushing Elenor hastily drew off ring and glove together and thrust them into her pocket. Hugh was watching her, for he had taken a seat directly opposite with May Singleton. Elenor looked up and met his eye with an appealing glance, which said, "I could not attract everybody's attention with that glittering tell-tale; I might as well proclaim it from the table."

Hugh understood, and smiled mischievously, which did not tend to lessen her confusion. Mr. Kennon and the rest were, however, happily unconscious of this little episode, the former giving his attention to the appetizing supper, while Mrs. Stacey and Ada were engaged in an animated conversation with Dr. Towns on the claim to precedence of their respective States, to which Major Stacey was listening with an amused smile.

It was not until they reached Columbia, and during their enforced detention there, that Hugh secured the rather dreaded interview with his sister ; and although his communication was a bitter confirmation of her fears, she was not wholly unprepared for something of the kind.

"O Hugh !" she exclaimed at last, when she had heard him through with silent but keen disappointment, as she saw the last remnant of hope fade away in regard to her pet scheme, "when you know my long cherished wish about you and Ada !"

"You are very clever and wise too, Lily," he said, "but you lack one sort of wisdom ; you forget we can't make things go as we wish ; 'Man proposes, but God disposes.' If Ada and I were the only living man and woman, I could not love her ; so try to be content, my dear, good sister, and receive Elenor as the betrothed of your spoiled brother, and love her for his sake—will you not ?" he asked, as he put his arm around his sister in his old caressing way, she had never been able to resist.

"But, Hugh, what do you know of this girl's antecedents ? she knows nothing herself, and—"

"Never mind about that now, Lily, it is too late—the thing is done, and nothing can change it—no earthly power, so try to be reconciled," Hugh hastened to say, for he was tired of hearing any allusion to the mystery of Elenor's birth.

"Well, if you are satisfied, I am sure I ought to be,"

replied Mrs. Stacey, as she dashed away the tears of chagrin and disappointment she could not altogether restrain.

“ Shall I tell Elenor you are ready to receive her as a sister ? ”

“ Yes, of-course ; I will do so myself as soon as an opportunity offers,” replied Mrs. Stacey, with an effort to make the best of it, for Hugh’s sake ; but in her heart she felt that she almost hated Elenor at the moment.

“ Lily, I have ordered carriages to take a drive around the city after breakfast, and see what is to be seen,” said Hugh, as he rose to leave the room.

“ Very well, I will go and hurry the girls, for I know it is nearly breakfast time.”

Altogether it was an agreeable journey, and none of the party seemed to enjoy it more than Maud and Wattie, though they vexed Maumer Betty’s righteous soul and kept her constantly on the alert to keep them out of danger. Wattie lost his hat as they crossed the Yadkin, by putting his head out of the window to get a sight of the river, when a gust of wind took it off, and he saw it sail away beyond recovery, and drop like a bird on the water. “ Dare now, chile, didn’t I tell you keep your hed ouden dat winder ; now wat you gwine do ? reckon you keep your head in now, you ain’t got no hat on it.”

“ I don’t care, nobody wants a hat on the cars, and I’ve got my Sunday hat in mamma’s trunk,” said Wattie stoutly, not to be intimidated by so trifling a loss.

“ Well, go tell your ma you done loss your hat ; reckon she’ll keer, ef you don’t, case she know hats don’t grow on trees, and money nuther.”

CHAPTER XV.

As our party were in search of pleasure, rather than health, they went, first, to White Sulphur, where such votaries most do congregate. Dr. Towns and Mr. Kennon left them at Richmond, promising to join them again after a short sojourn with their friends.

They found Stacey Hamilton impatiently awaiting their arrival, and Uncle and Aunt were quite surprised to find him such a well-grown, manly boy—for several years had passed since they had met. Stacey was now eighteen, and unusually mature and intelligent for his age. Being the eldest of the family, his parents had treated him more as a companion, than a child—they were also very proud and ambitious for him, and altogether Stacey's training had impressed him with the belief that Hamilton blood was a little better and *bluer* than that which coursed through the veins of ordinary mortals.

He and May soon became good friends, though his manner was just a little patronizing towards her, which she rather resented, as she felt herself quite Stacey's equal in age and experience. What girl of fifteen would not? When other youth sought her society, and seemed disposed to be attentive, Stacey looked on with doubtful approval, and he finally said to her one day, "May, you don't know anything about those fellows—you ought to be careful."

She replied, "Why, Stacey, they seem to be nice boys—very gentlemanly—I can only judge by that. Of course, one cannot know exactly who everybody is at a place like

this, but I am under your uncle's care, and he will tell me when I am wrong in receiving the attentions of a young man. You are too particular, Stacey, and I must say, rather proud and exclusive."

A new life seemed opening to Elenor; her heart was at rest in regard to her engagement to Hugh, and never before had the world looked so bright and attractive to her inexperienced eyes. "Oh!" she said to herself, "how could Sister Florine say there was nothing but trouble and unhappiness in the world! Everybody seems happy and kind, and to enjoy life so much!" Poor child! she only saw the surface. She could not, in that gay and brilliant throng see the heartache, the envy, the struggle to keep up appearances—the skeleton hid away in the closet, from the eye of the indifferent and unsympathizing world. Life did, indeed, at this shrine of fashion, seem but a gala-day of enjoyment—but a prolonged festival! ah, 'twas only seeming, in many instances, for even in our little party, there was one aching heart. Mrs. Stacey had told Ada of her brother's engagement to Miss Fane, adding that they did not care to have it known by the world yet; and Ada knew that the sweetest hope had died out of her life! As a child, Hugh had been her hero; as a woman, her ideal of all that was best and noblest in man, and another had won the love she would have given her life to possess; and that she believed might have been hers if Elenor had not crossed his pathway. And while Ada Singleton was too good a Christian to hate any of God's creatures, there was a fierce struggle with her rebellious heart to subdue a feeling of bitterness towards Elenor, lovely and loveable as she could but acknowledge her rival to be, yet had not that very loveliness, that, at times, seemed almost hateful to her, won Hugh away from her? But Ada's native strength of character nerved her to endure and make no sign—"to suffer and be strong," so

that even Mrs. Stacey, who knew her best, was deceived into believing she had been mistaken in thinking Ada had a tenderer feeling than friendship for her brother, so calm and smiling was the serene countenance that never for a moment betrayed the pang that pierced the faithful, fond heart, at her friend's communication.

Both Ada and Elenor soon became very popular, but the latter bore off the palm for beauty, though there were rivals to the claim from almost every State in the Union; but the theme of every masculine tongue—even of middle-aged and old men, was the beautiful Miss Fane. "Who is she? a relation of the Stacey's? their position is unquestioned at least, and it is enough that she is under their protection. Young Legare seems quite devoted—perhaps they are engaged?" and numberless similar questions and surmises, which whether satisfactorily answered or not, did not alter the fact that Elenor was soon the acknowledged belle of the Springs.

Though Hugh was flattered at the sensation she created, still he was also a little uneasy, and disgusted too, that he could not have more of her society—she seemed drifting away from him on the waves of adulation and flattery that surrounded her. She is certainly passing through the ordeal by which Hugh desired she should be tried. Will she remain true?

They had been at White Sulphur nearly two weeks when Dr. Towns and Mr. Kennon again joined them, accompanied by a sister of the former, Miss Isabel Towns, and a cousin of the latter, Miss Virginia Fairfax. Of course, they were warmly welcomed, and the gentlemen could not conceal the pleasure they felt at again meeting Ada and Elenor.

"Miss Fane," said Mr. Kennon, a few hours after his arrival, when he had inveigled Elenor into a promenade, "They all accused me at home of having lost my heart."

"Ah, and did you admit the 'soft impeachment?'" asked Elenor.

"I could not deny it with a very good grace, knowing it was true," he replied.

"I have heard you are a great flirt, Mr. Kennon, in fact, that the amusement has been reduced to an art by you; and cupid's darts do not usually inflict very serious wounds in such hearts, so I need not offer you my sympathy," laughed Elenor.

"Who has done me such an injury in your good opinion, Miss Fane? I should be deeply pained to know that you believed it," replied Mr. Kennon gravely.

"Why, of course I believe it, and I imagined you lady-killers were rather proud of your prowess in that line," said Elenor, with a light laugh that rather stung the young man.

"I do not lay claim to any prowess of the kind, and am very sorry I have been prejudiced in *your* eyes—you, whose good opinion I so earnestly desire," returned Mr. Kennon with some excitement, and warmth of feeling.

"Oh, I think it rather interesting to meet such a person. When you know it, you are on the defensive against their fascinations; and I believe I shall like you in spite of the danger I encounter—I have always been rather daring."

"I know you are laughing at me, Miss Fane, and I cannot exonerate myself, as I see you are incredulous."

Mr. Kennon was a flirt, but for the first time in his life he was in earnest, and his heart was touched by the holy passion he had so often simulated. He did not know that Elenor was already won, and so, blindly, he allowed his hitherto unsuspected strength and fervor of affection to go out towards this girl, of whom he only knew, that she was beautiful and loveable beyond anything he had ever dreamed of before. And now how should he convince her of his sincerity?

“Oh no, Mr. Kennon, indeed I am not. I told you I rather admired a flirt, but two can play at that game, you know, and forewarned is forearmed. But we must really return to the ball-room ; I promised Stacey Hamilton a waltz to-night, and it must be my last, for I am tired out, and fear I shall be worn out before two months have passed. How time flies at a place like this ; it seems only a few days since our arrival.”

“Yes, time passes unheeded, when every hour is winged with pleasures, golden-tipped.”

Miss Towns and Miss Fairfax were regular society girls, rather pretty, and very stylish, without being at all beautiful. This was not their first season at a fashionable watering-place, as was the case with Ada and Elenor, so they found many friends and acquaintances, and seemed entirely at home. Miss Fairfax had the reputation of being something of a *blue*, and was so sarcastic that the men paid tribute at her shrine, with fear and trembling. She and Hugh took quite a fancy to each other, and he really enjoyed her sprightly conversation, though she was often severe on the follies of her own sex, and mankind in general.

Dr. Towns was quite assiduous in his attentions to Ada Singleton, and she admired him more than any gentleman whose acquaintance she had formed ; for he was unusually, cultivated and entertaining, and his whole bearing indicated in the highest degree the true gentleman. Mr. Kennon hovered so closely about Elenor, for the next few days, that Hugh was becoming just a little annoyed, if not jealous ; and no wonder, for it was quite patent to a less interested observer than he, that Mr. Kennon was either pretendedly or really, deeply in love, and quite content that everybody should know it. He let no opportunity pass to whisper “soft nothings” into her ear, but she would turn his love-making into jests, until he was almost

desperate, and knew not how to convince her that he was serious.

“Miss Fane,” he said to her one morning, as they loitered, with others of their party, in one of the cool, dim-lit parlors, but, they, as usual, apart from the rest, “you are the most incredulous unbelieving woman I ever met; have you no faith in man at all?”

“Certainly, Mr. Kennon, a great deal of faith in many men,” replied Elenor teasingly.

“So it is only in me, and my professions, that you have no faith; that is hard, Miss Fane; it is unkind, cruel! I could not have believed it of you,” and Mr. Kennon was silent for some moments, waiting for a disclaimer from Elenor, which did not come. At last he took from her hand, her tablets, with which she was toying, and taking out his pencil, wrote busily for a few moments, and handed them back to her, without a word; and as silently she turned them and read:

“Better trust all and be deceived,
And weep that trust and that deceiving,
Than lose a heart, that, if believed,
Would bless thy life with true believing.”

“She smiled, and held out her hand for the pencil, and hastily wrote the following impromptu:

“Better doubt all—be not deceived—
And boast that doubt and unbelieving,
Than trust a heart, that, if believed,
Would curse thy life with its deceiving.”

“Bravo! Miss Fane, splendid! But I prefer the sentiment of Fanny Kemble’s, though doubtless she had cause to change her views, as the heart she trusted ‘cursed her life with its deceiving,’” said Mr. Kennon, after he had read Elenor’s reply.

“What is that, Kennon?” asked Hugh, leaving his seat by Miss Fairfax rather abruptly, and coming over to where Elenor and Kennon had seemed so engaged in their *tête-à-tête*, as to be almost oblivious of the presence of others. Hugh had been watching them furtively, with a feeling somewhat akin to fear that perhaps, after all, Elenor was beginning to like Kennon more than he knew, for he was certainly a fascinating man to most women, and Hugh had seen a great deal of the wonderful influence he exerted over the fair sex in Savannah, and now, something Elenor had said or done, seemed to please him very much; he must know *what*, at the risk of intruding. “Do let us enjoy it with you, if it is no secret or treasonable *morceau* that you are enjoying.”

“Oh, no, and it is too good to be lost; shall I show it to him, Miss Fane?”

Dr. Towns and Ada had also joined them, and Mr. Kennon said, “I will read them both for the benefit of the crowd, eh, Miss Fane?”

“As you like,” replied Elenor. They all applauded and complimented Elenor on her readiness at impromptu. But Hugh was not reassured; he thought Kennon must mean business, and was rather silent and preoccupied for the rest of the morning.

“Miss Fane,” said Kennon, detaining Elenor a moment after Mrs. Stacey had suggested that it was time to dress for dinner, “will you take that drive with me this afternoon, that you have promised, when I could find you unengaged?”

“I am sorry to disappoint you again, but I have promised to take a horseback ride with Mr. Legare.”

“Well, I am unfortunate; the Fates are against our taking that drive, I see, and I take it as ominous.”

“Of what, Mr. Kennon?” asked Elenor smiling.

“That I am doomed to disappointment in a more im-

important matter on which my heart is set," he answered in a low tone intended only for her ear, but Hugh heard it. "Will you go to-morrow evening? it is my last chance."

"Yes; I know nothing to prevent, now."

"But I believe something will happen to prevent," he said, "I've grown superstitious about that coveted drive."

"Oh, the Fates will be propitious this time, I hope," replied Elenor lightly, as she left him.

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Ada was to ride with Dr. Towns. With no spice of vanity she would have been more obtuse than her sex usually are in such matters, if she had failed to perceive that Dr. Towns was growing more and more fond of her society. His attention was very flattering, and his tender deference pleasing to her sorely-wounded heart; but whether or not she returned this growing preference, his agreeable society and kind thoughtfulness had done much to divert her mind from her great, but hidden disappointment, and to render her sojourn in Virginia far more pleasant than it would otherwise have been.

Never had Elenor looked more lovely in Hugh's eyes, than on that afternoon ride; and it brought back vividly to both their first one, along the quiet country road at Aspendale, though she was now quite an accomplished horsewoman, and Hugh had no need to play instructor. The evening was charming, with just enough of the bracing and exhilarating in the pure mountain air to make it a delight to breathe it, and to set all your blood (young blood especially) tingling in your veins. They had reached a point, a favorite and favorable one, from which to view the sunset; they drew rein, and were silent with admiring awe at the scene spread out before them. Ada and Dr. Towns had been left far behind in their more sober gait.

"O Hugh!" said Elenor at last, "is it not lovely? If earth is so fair, what must Heaven be? and if one can

be so perfectly happy in this world as I am, it will be hard to leave it."

"And are you so happy, darling?" he asked, looking more at her than at the beautiful scene.

"Too happy, Hugh; I tremble at its excess, and something whispers it cannot last; it never does, they say—at least, Sister Florine says so, and she is so wise and good," and a shadow of coming events, it almost seemed, stole for a moment over the brightness of her face.

"Why should it not last, dear? If we are true to each other, nothing can come between us but death, though I have begun to fear that Kennon covets my rare jewel; for I think he is badly smitten, and I almost wish I had told him of our engagement, eh, Nellie?"

"You need not feel apprehensive, Hugh, or waste your sympathy on him; he is only indulging in a watering-place flirtation, I guess."

"No, I fear he is really in earnest for the first time in his life."

"Well, it is no matter, then, if he feels something of the pain he has doubtless often inflicted on some poor, credulous girl; but I think you are mistaken."

"Is not this magnificent, Miss Fane?" exclaimed Dr. Towns, as he and Ada drew up beside them. "Who would sigh for Italia's sunsets, after seeing this? Miss Singleton," turning to Ada, as she gazed with a far-away rapt look of pensive sadness, into the blue and purple depths and heights beyond and below her; "do you not feel inspired to write an ode to sunset?"

"No, I console myself with the reflection that I am one of the poets who never pen their inspirations," replied Ada rousing from her reverie.

"Miss Fane, you ought to be a poetess, if physiognomy means anything."

"I am like Ada, a silent worshipper at the shrine of

the Muses. I never could give expression to my thoughts, when I feel most intensely, said Elenor turning her beaming face radiant with happiness and the sunset's parting glow, on Dr. Towns.

"I think, Hugh, Miss Fane must be an unconcious poetess, and only needs a heart-breaking trouble to develop her latent talent, as flowers that must be crushed before they yield their sweetest perfume," said Dr. Towns, turning to Hugh, who had been silently watching the shifting light and shade of the entrancing picture.

"Well, let us hope Miss Fane's poetic talent will not be so severely tested ; rather let it remain latent forever !" returned Hugh fervently.

"Amen ! to that, I say with all my heart," responded Dr. Towns, "but is it not time to return ? this mountain air grows chill as soon as the sun withdraws his genial rays."

And so, reluctant to leave the fading glories of the lovely landscape, they rode back, more silent than they came, each busy with the thoughts—we utter not,

"Deep treasured in our inmost soul,
Never revealed, yet ne'er forgot."

CHAPTER XVI.

POLITICAL life, with its excitement, trickery, and vulgar complications, had always inspired Col. Stacey with horror and repugnance. His ambition did not lead in that direction ; he preferred the quiet pleasures of study, and the peaceful country life he had always led (save during the four years of fierce civil strife), but he could not be

deaf to the call of his country now as then, or indifferent to the wishes of his many friends to become their representative in the State legislature. And when he was so urged on all sides, his love for his native State, his sincere regard for her interest and welfare, would not suffer him to ignore her call to serve her in this capacity, even at the sacrifice for a time of his congenial and quiet pursuits ; and as Brooks was the radical candidate, he determined to do what he could to prevent the evil to his county that the election of such a man would be. So while the rest were enjoying themselves at the Springs, he was plunging heart and brain into the political struggle, bent on winning, if fair means and hard work could accomplish the end.

And to-day came the "tug of war ;" the contest opened with a mass-meeting to be held in Clinton ; the crowd was immense, white and black, republican and democrat from far and near were present, Brooks was the first to speak, and he concluded his long tirade with, as he thought, these telling words : "I think it a good thing for you, my friends, who were the *bottom rail* before the war, that the proud aristocrats of the South lost their slaves ; there's some chance now for you to rise to the top. Before you had to compete with the rich man's slave, and work cheap, to get work at all ; now, a heap of the aristocrats are down in the world, their negroes are free, their property gone, and the poor man has a chance to own some of the broad lands they once called their own, and a voice in the councils of the nation, and in making the laws by which he is to be governed. But there are some of those would-be aristocrats left, chips of the old block (pointing significantly towards Col. Stacey), beware of them ! you of the so-called lower classes, honest farmers and mechanics ; and you, my colored friends, beware of them ! Are they to represent you, the bone and sinew of the country ? These curled darlings of a dead aristocracy, who were once your

masters and oppressors, and would be again, if they dared ! (cries of that's so, that's so, and shame ! treason ! and hisses). Are they to represent the interest of the working-class, and the freedmen, with whom they have no sympathy ? I tell you, no ! I do not say send me, but I do say send some one who feels an interest in you and will work for your good, and not for the advancement of a moneyed aristocracy. And, I dare to add, in the words of the immortal Pitt, 'If this be treason, make the most of it !' (great applause). When Columbus landed on Plymouth rock, he proclaimed liberty and equality to all, both black and white, and I for one endorse the grand words of our own Washington, 'Give me liberty, or give me death !' " (hear ! hear ! 'rah for Brooks ! mingled with groans and hisses.) As the speaker left the stand the crowd became clamorous for Stacey, and a perfect storm of applause greeted him as he took his place with a quiet dignity and grace, that formed a pleasing contrast to the coarse bully and demagogue who had preceded him.

It is needless to detail all that Col. Stacey said in a speech of more than two hours, in which he held that surging mass spell-bound, by the power, not so much of eloquence, as of *truth*, and the perfect confidence they reposed in his integrity, and the purity of his aims and motives. He soon disposed of his opponent, exposing his petty schemes and vile trickery, and then launched out into an explanation of the true end and aim of all government, the real interpretation of the constitution as framed by our fathers, and the consequences of any infringement of the sacred compact, by those who would lay sacrilegious hands on this paladium of our rights, this bulwark of our liberties, etc.

When he concluded, Brooks felt several degrees smaller in his own estimation and doubtless that of many even of his own party. From that hour, Col. Stacey's election was

a *fait accompli*—Brooks refused absolutely to meet him again, and changed all his appointments ; but it was of no avail, for a few months later, Col. Stacey was elected by an overwhelming majority, and Theodore Brooks retired to his native obscurity a wiser man in his estimate of an intelligent and discriminating Georgia public. He was one of a class that existed in the South soon after the war, who hoped to float on the turbid and unsettled current of the political stream, to high places of trust and profit—their noblest aim being their own promotion ; their most dominant feeling, a hankering after the flesh-pots of Egypt. He had little education, and less culture, but had managed to pick up a few Latin phrases, and immortal sayings familiar to every school-boy, which he lugged into his speeches, and mingled curiously (as he invariably ascribed them to the wrong source) in his conversation, to the wonder of the ignorant, and the amusement of the more cultivated. Col. Stacey told a rather amusing incident of the kind one day at Aspendale, on his return from a trip on which he and Brooks happened to be fellow-travellers for a little way. While they were waiting at the depot for the train, Brooks said : “ Colonel, you see that heap of bones—do you know what they are for ? ”

“ For fertilizers, I suppose,” replied Col. Stacey.

“ No, they are to make this *Magnum Bonum Blacking* ; *Magnum*, to make—*Bonus*, bones ; don’t you see ? ” returned Brooks, looking consequential as was his habit.

“ Ah, yes, I see,” said Col. Stacey, smiling demurely, “ it is a great thing to be a scholar like you, Brooks.” But Brooks was too obtuse, or conceited to discover the irony in the tone and words, so went his way more self-complacent than ever. Such was the man who had actually been admitted to the Georgia bar (no very difficult thing)—a blustering ignoramus, who hoped to gain the suffrages of an intelligent, and for the most part, cultivated commu-

nity ; or I should rather say, he hoped to *represent* this community, through the votes of the negro, and riffraff among the whites, gained by appealing to their baser passions, and arousing their jealousy of the better educated, and more refined class.

* * * * *

It being Temple Gwynn's vacation, and needing diversion and rest from his too close application to his school and studies, he entered warmly into the political canvass, being a great admirer and partisan of Col. Stacey. He accompanied him frequently on his rounds, and the two soon became warm friends—notwithstanding the disparity of years, for they had much in common. Col. Stacey took great pains to draw him out, and would listen with sincere interest to his ambitious plans, and the noble course he had marked out for himself—and knowing that Gwynn was a great reader, Col. Stacey offered him the use of his library, and solicited frequent visits to the Hall. Robert Brent often made one of the party, so that Col. Stacey did not miss the inmates of Aspendale as he had anticipated, and even Elenor was forgotten, at times, in the new career on which he had entered, and the congenial and pleasant companionship of his two young friends. His little favorite, Winnie, was not neglected, and the cottage was still brightened by his presence, whenever he had a leisure hour.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. KENNON and Elenor *did not* take their drive the next afternoon ; for Major Stacey very suddenly determined to leave White Sulphur, and spend a few days at each, or most of the other resorts with which that region

abounds, promising to return to the first in time for the fancy ball, and then home ; so the girls were advised to be in readiness to start the next day.

Of course, their friends were solicited to join them, and were more than willing to regulate their movements by Major Stacey's charming party ; for there would no longer have been any attraction at the Springs, to Dr. Towns and Mr. Kennon, after the departure of Ada and Elenor.

Several weeks have elapsed, when we again find them returned, rather weary of packing and unpacking, to their first, and they all decide, favorite watering-place. At last, Mr. Kennon is about to be rewarded for his long waiting—Elenor has promised to drive with him the afternoon before the ball. At the appointed hour, he made his appearance with an elegant little basket phaeton and two diminutive milk-white ponies.

“What a fairy-like equipage you have, Mr. Kennon,” said Elenor, as he handed her in ; “are you not afraid our substantial persons will be too much for this frail carriage, and those little creatures ?”

“Not at all, the ponies are very strong, and so spirited I should feel almost afraid to trust so precious a life to their tender mercies, did I not hold the reins. Loose them, Harry,” to the servant, and off they darted with such speed, that it made Elenor catch her breath, and required all their driver's strength and attention for the next few moments. After they had quieted a little, Elenor said :

“How I should like to be the owner of just such a turnout as this. I wonder if I shall ever be so fortunate ?”

“Of course you will, if you wish. I think you are born to have everything you desire in this world ; and Miss Fane—” he paused, fearing, he knew not what, but could he let this opportunity slip ? “Elenor, give me the right, make me the happy being, to gratify your lightest wish.

I entreat you to hear me in all seriousness this once, and believe—you must feel, you must have seen, that I love you truly, devotedly—that I am terribly in earnest, and you will not treat my love any longer as a jest—say that you will not ! and tell me truly, if there is any hope for me !”

“No, I do believe you are sincere in your avowal, Mr. Kennon, but I am truly sorry to think so, for I cannot bid you hope. I would have spared you this, as you must have seen, and you know now, why I would never listen seriously to your protestations.”

“O Miss Fane ! do not tell me that there is really no hope for me ; do not be so cruel ! I have never loved before—give me the faintest hope of winning you, even if it be years hence, and I will be content ; will you not ?”

“You will see how impossible this is, Mr. Kennon, when I tell you, my heart is entirely and wholly another’s. We did not wish our engagement known, but it is due to you under the circumstances, to tell you, that I am engaged to your friend, Mr. Legare.” Kennon was thunderstruck by this announcement ; he had not suspected it for a moment, and the bitter truth rendered him speechless, yet now it seemed very plain. Why was he such a fool as not to see it before he allowed himself to fall so blindly in love ! He drove on in silence for some time, broken at last by Eleanor, who was too kind-hearted not to feel pained by his evident suffering. “I hope you do not blame me, Mr. Kennon. I am very sorry.”

“No, I do not blame you, but I do blame Hugh ; it was unkind to see me rushing blindly on my fate and not to warn me ; he might have told me, I would have kept his secret, and been spared this terrible blow—” Just then a buggy, driven by two reckless youngsters dashed furiously past them, startling the spirited ponies so that it was as much as Kennon could do to prevent their rushing off in a mad frolic after the other vehicle. “Confound those

unmannerly scamps ! they'd like to have given us a runaway, and I don't know if I should have cared to save Hugh Legare's betrothed, but I am glad I did not have the trial—ho ! steady—”

“ Why Mr. Kennon, you could not have been so un-Christian,” said Elenor laughing—“ besides, where would have been all your boasted regard for me ? And I must free Hugh from blame in your eyes, at the risk of calling down some on my own head ; he wished to tell you of our engagement, and I would not let him, He said to me one day, ‘ Elenor, I believe Will is becoming serious in his preference for you, and I shall be sorry I did not tell him if it is so ;’ but I replied (and I really thought it, Mr. Kennon), ‘ Nonsense, Hugh ! do not be so uneasy, Mr. Kennon is only trying to inveigle me into a watering-place flirtation. And so his apprehensions were allayed, but I know he would have spoken had he believed you in earnest ; so you must not blame him either—will you ?’ ”

“ Then I must bear all the blame of my blindness, and this pain too ; it is confounded—pardon me ! very hard, and I've a great notion to vow I will never love again, but keep on shamming—it does not hurt half so bad,” he returned, with an amusing mixture of the serio-comic in his countenance.

“ You think so now,” replied Elenor, smiling in spite of herself, “ but you will soon find some sweet girl with whom you will laugh at the idea of your ever having loved anyone but her.”

“ Never, never ! I shall never find another woman whom I could love as I do you ; though I must confess that lack of reciprocity is a pretty good antidote, but a bitter pill to swallow.”

“ And I hope will soon effect a cure,” said Elenor. “ Do not let Hugh and I feel that you have been made unhappy, even for an hour, by our want of candor.”

"I shall certainly *try*, Miss Fane, not to be miserable," replied Mr. Kennon, a little bitterly, "but some natures—and I fear mine is one—only long more intensely after the unattainable. Well *n'importe*; I'd rather suffer, than never to have seen and known you!"

"Thank you, Mr. Kennon! You have paid me the highest compliment a man can pay a woman, and I shall always think of you kindly; but it is time for us to turn back, you know how much time I shall have to devote to my toilet this evening."

"What character do you personate, Miss Fane?"

"I must not tell you; I wish to see if my dress is sufficiently suggestive to do that—will you appear *en costume*?"

"I had not intended, but think I could personate the 'forlorn lover' so perfectly to-night, I am tempted to try that character."

"Oh, do!" said Elenor gayly, "but I think you are almost cured now, and such an ordeal would, no doubt, hasten the desired end."

Mr. Kennon tried to smile, but it was rather the ghost of a smile, as he turned his ponies, and touching them up with a gentle tap of the whip, they sped along the smooth turnpike as swiftly, and almost as noiselessly, as the wind.

The ballroom and parlors were a bewildering maze of beautiful women, in exquisite costumes, mingled with knights and troubadours, kings and queens for the nonce, until the eye was almost wearied with the splendor and brilliancy of the gay scene.

Elenor and Ada, personated night and morning, as especially suited to their different styles. Elenor wore a light, airy *crêpe lisse*, with foamy puffings, that looked not unlike the milky-way; a sash of broad white ribbon loosely girdled her slight form—on one flowing end, Orion was outlined in silver stars, and on the other, the Southern Cross shone resplendent. Above her lovely brow a silver cres-

cent moon shed its pale beams, and in the dusky richness of her hair, Venus gleamed in rival brightness. Never had night more admiring worshippers, than her lovely representative, as she moved with sylph-like grace in the mazy dance.

And a fairer Aurora never waked the dawn than Ada, in clouds of rose-colored tulle, with a golden coronet of radiating sunbeams lighting the soft brown of her hair, in which gold-dust sparkled like dewdrops in the sun's first gladsome rays. Flowers garlanded her graceful figure, and trailed in profusion over her sweeping robe.

May, as a shepherdess, coquetted with her "Highland laddie," in the person of Stacey Hamilton, the gayest of the gay. But it is needless to mention all the striking costumes and fine impersonations; my readers have no doubt, seen a fancy-ball, and this one, of which we write, was doubtless much like any other.

On the morrow, Major Stacey and his party were to take their leave, and Dr. Towns had also determined to know his fate. Ada was certainly worth the effort, and to-night was looking unusually sweet and winning, he thought; and when he found himself alone with her under the soft moonlight, somewhat removed from the gay revellers, in a quiet promenade, he said:

"Miss Singleton, I cannot let you go to-morrow, without telling you that I love you, and asking your permission to visit you as I return to Savannah. May I come, and will you listen to my suit?"

"I cannot encourage you to come, Dr. Towns, save as a friend," replied Ada.

"But I should come as a lover—come to ask you to be my wife, may I not?"

"It would be useless, Dr. Towns; I must not let you come on a bootless errand; I can give you an answer now, and it is this, I can never be your wife."

“Miss Singleton, do not decide hastily, I beg you ; give me an opportunity of proving the depth and sincerity of my love ; let me come and try to win a return, if, alas, you do not already love another. Is this true, or is it that you dislike me ?”

“No, no,” returned Ada, hurriedly, “I esteem you most highly, and I wish—oh, I do indeed, wish that I could love you as you desire, but all the love I have to give has long ago been lavished on one who does not, and will never return it ; and I tell *you* this, that you may know how hopeless your suit is. Keep my secret, Dr. Towns, which I have never before breathed to mortal, hardly acknowledged to my own heart.”

“I will, dear Ada, *inviolately* ; but, surely, you will not persist in loving one who is indifferent to you ; let me try to win this love that would be such a precious boon to me, and so unwelcome and unprized by the blind idiot who knows not, or cares not for its value,” he urged.

“I wish it could be so, but I know my weak foolish heart too well ; it refuses to obey my will. Do you suppose I have not tried e’er this to crush out a love that can only bring me unhappiness ?”

“Poor child ! I am sorry for you, for I can now sympathize with the bitter pain of unrequited love ; but I must and shall at least try to efface from my heart all memory of the lesson which has been so pleasant in the learning, I hope with better success than you have attained. Farewell ! we may never meet again, but I trust in time, to you, too, may come a surcease of this pain !” He took her hand, pressed it to his lips, then led her back to the gay throng and disappeared.

There was no more pleasure for Ada that night, for she had learned to regard Dr. Towns with the highest esteem and friendship ; in fact, she admired him so truly, that she was almost tempted to believe, that such feelings might

surely merge into love, they seemed so nearly akin to it, though they only resembled the absorbing passion, she could but acknowledge to her own heart, that she felt for Hugh—"as the mist resembles the rain."

Still, she was truly grieved to give him pain, and she thought, "Have I not acted unwisely to reject the love of this noble, good man? Would it not be the surest way to cure myself of this mad folly, to accept the love of another? I surely must learn to love him. But no, I could not do him the great wrong to feign a love. I do not feel, at least not now. No, I must wait; sometime in the future—perhaps, when Hugh and Elenor are married, this love will die out of my foolish heart, and if he, or some other equally noble man seeks my hand, I may learn to love again, and peace and happiness at last be mine. Yes, it is better so; I can wait!" and musing thus she tried to put away the sight of Dr. Towns' sad face as he turned away, disappointed and unhappy at his failure to win a return of the hopeful love that had filled his heart. Ada was in her own room, which she had sought very soon after Dr. Towns had left her, and as she laid aside her ball-costume, her heart was heavy, and she almost regretted she had left her peaceful home, to which the prospect of so soon returning was soothing and welcome, after the excitement and doubtful pleasures of the last two months.

Elenor did not take to heart so much her refusal of Mr. Kennon—her heart was rejoicing in a love so perfect and satisfying, she could not sympathize so truly in the disappointment of another—nor could she believe so entirely in the depth and permanency of Mr. Kennon's passion—she believed it would soon pass away, and he be none the worse for it; but in this she wronged him somewhat, for while he lacked the constancy and endurance that such men as Dr. Towns possess, yet he loved Elenor as deeply and truly as he was capable of. Still she was right in believing he would

soon recover from its effects—yes, far sooner, than the less versatile but stronger and deeper nature of Ada's lover. "Besides," as she said to Hugh, "it does not matter much if he feels a little of the pain he has so often inflicted on my sex—circumstances have made me the Nemesis to avenge the wrongs they have suffered at his hands." But she could not help a little pang of pity and regret that she had been obliged to wound him, as she saw his vain attempt that night to seem gay and indifferent.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ASPENDALE and Roselawn were rejoicing in the return of their long absent inmates, and the lovely, dreamy, hazy October threw her enchantment over all. Hugh accompanied them home to remain one short week, and the children were given that week of grace, or I should rather say Elenor, for Hugh would not hear of her resuming her duties until he had taken his departure; and in fact Maud and Wattie were so wild with joy to be at home again, their father said it would be cruel to confine them to the school-room, until they had calmed down and explored all their familiar haunts.

And to Hugh, that week, in which he had his darling all to himself, was worth more than a dozen at the Springs. They rode, walked, and sat in cosy nooks by brook and brake, and basked in the soft sunshine, until their very souls seemed drunk with the love that beautified and glorified the whole world. Hugh was sailing on a cloudless sea, fearless of storms or breakers ahead, enjoying thoroughly the present, with only a sweet unrest and long-

ing for the time when Elenor would be his very own, his wife ! But she, with her woman's presentment was often startled by an undefined fear that it could not last, that something would occur to mar their too perfect happiness, and to this fear she often gave expression, but he would laugh at her apprehensions.

"No doubt it is foolish, Hugh," she said one day, "but if this mystery of my life was explained, I should not feel so, and I must write to Sister Florine at once. I cannot marry you until I know who and what I am ; I could not bear to have you reproach me with bringing you an uncertain origin or ignoble name."

"So you bring me yourself, darling, it is all I ask ; I know my sweet, pure flower never sprung from hybrid stem, or baleful source," answered Hugh confidently.

"Do not be too sure, Sir Hopeful ; I fear when my obscure and humble origin is made known, your proud spirit may shrink from linking your fate with one who cannot boast a long pedigree," returned Elenor, thinking that, however humble her birth, she could not, would not believe for a moment there was any *shame* attached to it.

But the letter to Sister Florine was deferred, for Hugh would not spare her long enough to write. "Wait, darling, until I am gone," he would plead, "there will be time enough ; think of the long three months that must pass—and each will seem an age to me before I can return to claim my bride."

But, at last, the short week was gone, and also Hugh ; and Elenor began to think in earnest of her letter to Sister Florine, whom she had never yet told of her engagement. But now she would tell her all—for everything had been arranged, and the wedding day fixed for the 23d of December. Elenor laughed softly to herself, as she pictured the good sister's surprise when she should receive the letter. It ran thus :

“DEAR SISTER:—I hardly know how to tell you of my great happiness—though you may have guessed it already, from hints in my former letters. I am engaged to be married!—for awhile we did not wish it known, but now it is all settled, with the knowledge and consent of Hugh’s (Mr. Legare’s) family. He is a brother of Mrs. Stacey, whose idol almost he is. She wished him to marry a very sweet girl—a near neighbor—whom he has known all his life, but he had the bad taste to fall in love with your little Nellie. I will not attempt to describe him, lest I should prove a too partial judge—but will only say—he comes up to my *ideal* of a man! We are to be married on the 23d of December and go for our bridal tour, to the beautiful land of flowers—sunny Florida. And now, dear sister, I *must* know all about my parents and birthplace, and have my guardian’s name and address, that I may write him of the important step I contemplate. Please get all necessary information from the Mother (of course she will not withhold it, under the circumstances) and let me hear from you as soon as possible. I will not marry any man with a mystery about my birth; and, it is right funny, I have not told Hugh my entire name yet, but will do so, as soon as I can tell him all about my parents. Oh, my one dear friend of the lonely life that is past, thank God with me, that He has sent me this great happiness! I shall await with impatience your answer, and your loving sympathy and congratulations. Your ever fond

“NELLIE.”

* * * * *

The weeks dragged slowly to Elenor, when one, two, three had gone by and still no response from Sister Florine; she had grown nervous and excited, by the long suspense and anxiety.

“Suppose, after all,” she thought, “that wretched woman still refuses to enlighten me—must I—will it be

right, to marry Hugh, with this mystery hanging over me?" but she could not answer the question satisfactorily to herself. In the meantime, Hugh's loving, cheerful letters came every few days to comfort her, and she was not entirely unhappy, feeling, whatever might be the result, secure in his protecting, tender love.

Elenor and Mrs. Stacey were out on the colonnade enjoying the lovely afternoon—it was the last day of that queen of months, October, and she was dying right royally! Shrouding her proud face in a veil of hazy mist, and drawing her scarlet robes about her, she awaited the end, defying death to rob her of one charm!

Elenor sat, gazing dreamily at the far-away, softly defined landscape beyond, and feeling a strange unrest, at variance with the peaceful scene, and a foreboding of ill, caused by the long delay to the solution of the question that now absorbed her thoughts, almost to the exclusion of her approaching marriage. She was presently aroused from her reverie, by the sound of horses' feet coming quickly up the avenue. She looked up, and her heart bounded again with expectation, for she saw it was Major Stacey, and she knew he had been to the village for the evening mail. Yes, it had surely come at last! this letter on which all her hopes of happiness seemed to depend! Major Stacey rode up to the steps, where the children were sitting, wearied with play, and called out cheerily,

"Here, Maud, take this letter to Aunt Elenor" (he often called her this, when he wished to tease her, and see the rich blood mount to her soft olive cheek), "and here is mamma's welcome 'Fashion Book,' and a letter, too," then he rode on into the backyard to deliver his horse to the stable-boy. Elenor's hands trembled with excitement as she opened her letter, and was soon devouring with eager eyes its contents. Mrs. Stacey was equally absorbed in one from Mrs. Hamilton, and the children on the floor,

in ecstasies over the pictures in the magazine. Suddenly, a piercing shriek rang out on the still evening air, startling Mrs. Stacey, who, looking up, saw Elenor's letter drop from her nerveless hands, and her face deathly pale. She sprang to the girl's side, and caught her in her arms as she swooned.

"Call papa, Maud—quick ! Elenor has fainted." Major Stacey soon came, and lifting her tenderly, bore her into the library, and laid her on the sofa.

"O Walter, is it only a fainting-fit, or is it death ?" said Mrs. Stacey, with face scarcely less pale than Elenor's, as she followed her husband.

"She has only fainted, I think, Lily ; but what could have caused it ?"

"I do not know ; had you not better send for Dr. Singleton, Walter ?"

"No, I do not think it necessary ; she will soon revive, I hope ; bring your sal-volatile and cologne, Lily." Tenderly Mrs. Stacey bathed the low brow, now pallid as in death, while her husband held the pungent salts to the delicate nostrils, but still no sign of returning consciousness. He felt her pulse ; there was a faint flutter, and he knew it was not death, though fearfully like it. The servants had gathered at the door, and Maumer Betty was doing what she could to aid in restoring the unconscious girl, while Patty stood looking on with streaming eyes. They plied every remedy, but with no perceptible effect—Mrs. Stacey could endure it no longer.

"Walter, do send for the doctor, we can do nothing."

"Patty, tell Tom to run as fast as his feet can carry him, and tell Dr. Singleton to come immediately," said Major Stacey, who had also become somewhat alarmed at the long swoon ; "and Maumer Betty you go and have some water heated, and prepare Miss Elenor's bed by the

time the doctor arrives. What could have caused it, Lily?" he asked again as the servant left the room.

"I cannot imagine, Walter, unless it was something in her letter; she was reading it, when all at once she gave a piercing scream, and when I looked up I saw she was fainting, and caught her just in time."

"Mamma, here is Miss Elenor's letter, she dropped it on the floor," said Maud coming into the room with the open letter, which she held out to her mother.

"Shall I read, it Walter; would it be right?" asked Mrs. Stacey, as she took the letter from her little daughter, telling her to run and play with Wattie, and keep him out of the room, while they cured her dear governess.

"Mamma, please tell me, will Miss Elenor die, like Aunt Maud, that Uncle Fred loved?"

"No, darling, I hope not; now go. I will tell you as soon as she is better," then turning to her husband again, "Shall I, Walter?"

"Yes, I think so; it may throw some light on this strange swoon, and it is best we should know its cause." Mrs. Stacey went to the window, for it was growing dusk, and this is what she read:

"MY DEAR NELLIE:—I have delayed so long, from a reluctance to give you pain, and because I have been trying, but without success so far, to ferret out *the truth*, for I do not believe what that wretched woman says *is true*. Remember this, and do not let it distress you, for I feel I know, my dear child, it must be false! Mother Serena says your mother was a quadroon slave, and you are the child of your guardian's brother, by this slave; that your father and mother are both dead; that she wished to keep you in ignorance of this, but as you insist on knowing who your parents were, she must tell you the bitter truth, but still refuses to give your guardian's name or address,

until she has his permission to do so. Now, my darling, try to bear this doubt and uncertainty awhile, and trust in God that the truth will come to light, for that it is a wilful, malicious falsehood, I believe; and you had better not make any revelations until you hear from me again. I trust to be able to *prove* it false, before your marriage, and rejoice from my heart, dear child, that you are happy in a good man's love. I will write as soon as I can get one ray of light; in the meantime, do not let this temporary cloud make you unhappy. God *will* remove it, and the sunlight of truth shine at last!

“Your loving, sympathizing friend and sister—

“FLORINE.”

“O Walter! poor child! poor darling—no wonder she swooned! it would be a mercy if she never waked again—and Hugh—it will kill him, Walter!”

“What is it, Lily? tell me—quick! she is reviving, I think.”

“Her mother was a slave—she has negro blood in her veins, is it not awful!” said Mrs. Stacey shuddering, as she put the letter in her pocket.

“It is an infamous lie! you have but to look at her, to be convinced of it,” exclaimed Major Stacey indignantly; “but hush! she will hear you!”

“I fear it is true, Walter,” returned his wife in a whisper; thinking of all the mystery and reticence regarding her birth, as she bent over Elenor and saw her eyelids quiver, then open with a frightened look in the soft, pleading eyes.

“What is it? What hurt me, Mrs. Stacey? did some one strike me?—oh! I remember, why did you bring me back to life? What is life to me now? Oh, let me die! let me die!” and she covered her face with her hands, as if to shut out the fearful horror that had sent her life-blood

curdling to her heart, and drowned in a temporary oblivion the agonizing thought, that now came back with all its maddening intensity, while blessed tears came to relieve her overwrought brain, and sobs of anguish convulsed her slender form.

“Dear Elenor, I have read your letter ; the horrid statement may not be true ; try to believe this, and do not give way so,” said Mrs. Stacey, fondly caressing the stricken girl, while tears of sympathy coursed down her own cheeks.

“No, no, it is true ! it is true ! that is the reason I have been kept in ignorance. Oh ! why was she not merciful ; why not still refuse to give up her dark secret ? But no, how could I bring this disgrace on Hugh ! my poor Hugh ! Oh, that I had never waked. What is life to me henceforth !”

“Elenor, you must be calm, dear child ; try to believe, what the good sister says. I think there can be no doubt that it is false ; take heart, dear girl, it will all come right. I myself believe it a malicious fabrication, for what end we do not know ; but it will yet be exposed, believe me,” said Major Stacey encouragingly.

“I thank you all for your faith, and words of comfort, but it is all dark to me now. Take me to my room, dear Mrs. Stacey, and leave me with my misery. No one can help me. I am alone, alone for evermore !”

Major Stacey lifted her in his strong arms, and bore her upstairs—Mrs. Stacey following, and then he left them together ; and when the doctor arrived, Elenor was in bed, and more calm.

Major Stacey told him of the shock she had received, and the long swoon that followed, and the old doctor was as indignant and unbelieving as the rest.

“But,” he said, “the effect on her will be the same as though it were true. I must see her, and give her some-

thing to make her sleep and forget it all, or it may end in brain fever. Do not allude to it, and don't let her think I know the cause of her attack—give Lily the hint; now let me see her,” and he followed Major Stacey upstairs.

“Ah, my child, you are paying for that fashionable dissipation at the Springs perhaps, and the mischief you played with your numerous victims. I heard of you,” said Dr. Singleton playfully, as he seated himself by her bed, and took her hand.

“O doctor!” it was almost a wail.

“Hush, my dear—not a word! I must do all the talking, and you must be perfectly quiet; your pulse is all right, let me see your tongue—why it is the usual length of a woman's.” Poor Elenor! a wan little smile flitted over the pale face, unused to aught but smiles of late, and tears welled up again, as she would have given expression to the bitter agony and shame with which her heart was bursting, but he checked her—

“Not a word, my dear! you must be quiet, my orders are imperative. I'll fix you—here take this and go to sleep, and let me find you bright and well to-morrow.”

“I shall never be that again, doctor, never!” said Elenor, after she had taken the medicine.

“Hush—sh—sh!” said the old doctor, “I will send Lily—good-night,” and he was gone, and Elenor could only murmur to herself:

“He knows it! he knows it! and all the world must know the blot, the shame, soon! would God I had never waked from that temporary oblivion!” and she pressed her hands wildly to her throbbing brain to still its fierce excitement, and crush out, if possible, the horrible, torturing thought. But the powerful opiate was beginning to take effect, and as Mrs. Stacey came in, and bent over her, she said dreamily.

“O Lily! Hugh's Lily! never now to be mine, do you

think I will die? Say that I will, and forget all this fearful, dark, mystery!" and her eyes closed wearily, and she slept.

"Thank God!" murmured Mrs. Stacey, "it will save her from madness, perhaps, poor girl! what the end will be, God alone knows." Mrs. Stacey went down to tell the doctor, who was still with Major Stacey, that Elenor was sleeping—and making her arrangements, she returned to spend the night with the stricken girl, catching what rest she could, as she reclined, still dressed, on the bed by her side.

Elenor did not rouse from her long, death-like slumber, until noon of the next day. Dr. Singleton had called in the morning, and said it was well, "Do not let her be disturbed, she will herself awaken, as soon as the effect of the opiate passes off; then I trust all danger of brain fever will be over. Try to divert her mind from her trouble—do not let her talk of, or dwell on it."

But this was no easy task. As soon as she was fully roused from sleep, Mrs. Stacey begged her to take some breakfast, and she consented to try, but only managed to swallow a cup of strong coffee, and eat a few mouthfuls of toast. The tempting broiled chicken, rolls, omelette, and other dainties were left untouched, much to Maumer Betty's disgust, who had given her personal supervision to its preparation, and arrayed it as temptingly as possible on the waiter, and when she had carried it, disappointed away, Elenor said:

"Mrs. Stacey, I am going to get up and dress; I have no time to waste in bed."

"No, dear, wait until you are stronger," urged her friend.

"I am as strong as I shall ever be until this thing is settled. This doubt and uncertainty will kill me; better, far better, the real truth, however terrible, than this suspense.

I shall write to Hugh, and tell him he is free, and then to Sister Florine, and tell her I am coming to her at once. I must and will find out whether or not this horrid thing is true, and if it is, I shall enter a convent, never more to look upon the world, this beautiful world, dear friend, where I was so happy, ah, too happy! I knew, I knew it could not last—

“ ’Twas bright, ’twas heavenly, but ’tis past ! ”

“ O Elenor, my dear child ! don’t speak so despairingly, it will all be made plain ; try to hope for the best, and don’t undertake this now, I beg of you,” said Mrs. Stacey, wondering at the girl’s calmness and determination, when she had been so stricken by the blow at first. But it was only the calmness of desperation. Elenor knew that inaction for her, in her present condition, was simply madness ; so she replied :

“ I must, dear friend ; I shall go crazy if I cannot do something—at least, make an effort, to solve this dark enigma. I know you and your kind husband will absolve me from my engagement, which would so soon have closed anyway, for I could not teach under existing circumstances. I shall write a few lines to Sister Florine, and follow them as soon as possible. This is Tuesday, I can be ready to leave Thursday morning ; I must go to the dearest friend I have known.”

“ Are you sure you feel equal to it, my dear ? Can you not defer writing until to-morrow ? ”

“ Oh no, I must write now ; my heart is almost bursting to unburden itself to the two I love best on earth, and who I know love me above everything else. Dear friend, let me write,” and tears came in the lovely, pleading eyes, as she thought of those so dear, both perhaps to be so soon lost to her forever. Mrs. Stacey answered tenderly,

"Certainly, dear, if you feel strong enough ; but let me help you dress, and I will send Patty to light a fire ; it is a little chilly, and it will look cheerful. You know, dear Elenor, my husband and I sympathize most truly with you, and hope and believe it is all a terrible mistake, if not a wilful falsehood."

"Yes, I know, and thank you, and as you say, it may be false ; but I must accept it as true until its falsehood is proven, and act accordingly."

But it was long after Mrs. Stacey left her, before Elenor could summon strength and courage to write to Hugh ; the few lines to Sister Florine were soon dispatched, only this :

"November 1st, 18—.

"DEAR SISTER :—I am coming to you at once—shall leave here the 3d (Thursday). Meet me at the depot, and go with me to a hotel, or any boarding-house you may select. I cannot go within those hated walls, or see that woman yet. Your unhappy—

"NELLIE."

Then the struggle came ! yet she did not falter in her determination, although an almost heart-broken wail was wrung from her. "Oh, my love, my love ! how can I give you up ! it is the cruelest pang of all !" She threw herself on the rug, and burying her face in her arms, let the waves of sorrow sweep over her soul unchecked. She heeded not the passage of time — it might have been hours, it might have been only moments, she could not tell. Patty knocked at her door, for it was growing dusk, and her little maid had come to light her lamp. Like David she arose from the earth, and washed herself, and said to her heart, "I shall go to him (not now, but sometime) but he shall not return to me." Yes, her lover, her bonny Hugh was dead to her—a gulf deeper, darker, than the

river of death divided them now; but "one comforting thought remained, which contrasted with the darkness of all else, gleamed out as an actual joy," *Hugh had loved her*—she believed, would always love her, nothing could destroy that.

"Patty, my good girl, mend my fire a little, and then you can go, I shall not need you any more to-night; and tell your mistress, I do not wish any supper, but that I am feeling better, and she need not trouble to come up again to-night."

"Yes'um; and Misses told me to ax you how you was feelin'; but you orter eat somethin', Miss El'n'r; won't you jes have a cup ob tea?"

"Well, Patty, you may bring me a cup of tea, very strong, nothing else; I am very busy, and must be alone."

* * * * *

"O my darling! how can I tell you what I know will make you miserable—and yet I must! I cannot bring disgrace and shame to you, and it would be both, to link your fate with mine now, for they tell me my mother was a *quadroon slave*, not even a lawful wife! Think of it, Hugh, and imagine, if you can, my agony! And added to this, I must also lose you! This is the sharpest pang of all—that I must say, Hugh, you are free! I cannot bring you a tainted name, a disgraceful origin—no! and you cannot wish it. Farewell! my beloved, forever! In that happier clime, where no earth-stain clings, where all are alike *pure*, I trust we may meet again, and our severed spirits rejoice in a blessed re-union! Until then—farewell! I shall never cease to love, and pray for you, my darling! my love! dearer than life, to your poor fond, unhappy—

"ELENOR."

This was her letter to Hugh. The next day she spent in packing, and in taking a long, lonely walk to look her

last on the scene of her greatest happiness, and greatest sorrow ! All that Major Stacey and his wife could say to dissuade her from going was of no avail ; and Thursday morning the sad, crushed woman that was driven out of the gates of Aspendale—she thought, forever, bore little resemblance to the happy, hopeful girl that entered them, little more than one year before !

CHAPTER XIX.

WHERE was Col. Stacey during these dark days that had fallen on the girl he had loved, and felt so deep an interest in still ? True, he regarded her now with the calm, pure affection he would have felt for a sweet young sister or niece, yet she had taken a deep hold on his heart, and I think was dearer to him than even his nearest of kin. But he was absent from home when her trouble came, and Elenor had been glad that this was so ; for she felt that not even Col. Stacey could help her in this trying hour ; and she could not bear to see the pain of those who cared for her, yet were powerless to remove, or even assuage, the bitter pain she must endure. She had taken some comfort in the thought, that the sight of Hugh's suffering when he should learn the harrowing truth, would be spared her.

When Col. Stacey returned a few days after Elenor had left Aspendale, he was much shocked and grieved at the tidings that greeted him, and would have followed at once the, as he believed, wronged girl, to aid her if possible, and to confront and demand the truth from the woman who had dared to assert this monstrous and improbable story ! If he only had done so, how much misery he might have

saved all concerned ! But his brother and sister-in-law both advised against it. “ You can do no good, Fred ; she has gone to her best friend, and she—an inmate of the convent, who has influence with the Mother—can certainly do more than you could, to clear up the mystery,” they both urged, and he yielded—fatal yielding ! And while Col. Stacey consented to wait until they heard from Elenor, he wrote to her immediately, offering his services, if he could be of any possible use to her, expressing his deep sympathy in her temporary trouble, and his entire conviction of the falsity of the assertion, etc. And restlessly he waited for tidings of the unhappy girl.

But to Hugh was the blow most crushing : he was almost beside himself ; business, society, everything was hateful to him—only one thought was burned into his brain, “ the child of a slave ! negro blood in her veins ! Never will I believe it, my pure, beautiful darling ! ” And a few days saw him steaming away to Aspendale, to take counsel of Major Stacey and his sister, before he hastened to follow Elenor (for Mrs. Stacey had written him of her departure) and assure her of his unchanging love, and urge her to marry him at once, so that he might aid her more effectively in proving the vile assertion, the cunningly devised falsehood he believed it to be. But when he reached Aspendale, his sister bitterly opposed such a step, much as she loved Elenor ; and as truly sorry as she felt for her, she could not endure the thought of her proud brother marrying a girl on whose parentage rested the shadow of a doubt. All this must be cleared up before she would ever countenance it—true, she had not known anything positive before—but she never dreamed of shame in connection with that proud, refined girl ; but now, when the mystery had assumed so *dark a hue*, the idea was horrible to her.

“ Hugh ! my darling, my only brother, listen to your sister,” she pleaded, “ and *wait* ; there can be no harm in

that ; write to Elenor, if you will, but do not go yet, we shall hear from her in a few days no doubt, and then you can decide what is best to do."

"I have decided now, Lily, I shall go ; I should hate myself, if I could give up the woman I love better than my life, because the vile breath of slander, from one wicked woman, has dared to assail her ! I only came by to learn the name of the little village that has been her home heretofore, and to which I suppose she has returned. No ; I shall leave here to-morrow, God willing, and never rest until she has given me the right to protect her against all such malicious assailants," said Hugh with decision.

"Hugh, you force me to it, and I can be as obstinate as you, for *never* will I receive Elenor Fane as a sister, with this doubt resting on her birth ! Now, you can choose between us."

"I have chosen, Lily ; Elenor is dearer to me than all the world—without her, life is valueless, but I am sorry to lose my sister," he returned calmly, but still decidedly.

"O Hugh ! you will break my heart ! I, that have loved you so, and been mother and sister both in one !" exclaimed Mrs. Stacey, bursting into tears, as she arose and left the room. Hugh paced restlessly to and fro—he grudged every moment that detained him from the sweet task of comforting his darling ; he longed for the morning, that he might fly away on the wings of love to her side, and fold her in his strong, protecting arms—close, close, from every breath that would sully her angelic purity, or offend her refined, sensitive nature !

* * * * *

When Elenor reached Linvale, she found Sister Florine waiting her at the depot, and was soon clasped in her loving arms. Almost in silence they drove to the select boarding-house where Sister Florine had taken rooms. As soon as they were shut within from prying eyes, Ele-

nor's fortitude gave way, and she wept and sobbed, on the faithful bosom of her friend, in such terrible abandonment of grief, that Sister Florine was alarmed.

"Oh, my dear child, don't give way so, you distress me, and will make yourself ill ; try to be more composed—your tears may be useless. I hope to be able to prove this ; until then, hope for the best, and put your trust in God. He is leading you by a way you know not now, but shall know hereafter. Let this trial draw you nearer to Him, and even the thing you so dread and loathe, may prove a blessing in disguise."

"O, Sister Florine ! how can you say that ? how can you think it could ever prove a blessing—the degrading, humiliating fact, that my mother was a slave, and I, the child of shame ? It is horrible ! I shall go crazy—I cannot, cannot endure it !"

"My dear, you are not to blame if it should be true ; in the sight of God you would be just as pure, and your soul as precious, as though you were the descendant of kings," said Sister Florine, trying to soothe and comfort the distressed girl.

"All that you say may be true, dear sister, but that does not take away the stain and disgrace in the eyes of the world, or make me a fitting mate for Hugh Legare. Oh, my love ! my love ! how can I bear to give you up forever !" and Elenor threw herself on the bed, and buried her face in the pillows.

"You may not have to give him up, dear child ; you are both young, and can afford to wait. Try to take comfort, and let me send up your tea—I hear the bell now. Bathe your eyes, and try to eat something."

"I shall never feel like eating any more, I think. I have not, since I received your letter that crushed every hope, and darkened all my life."

"This is wrong, my dear. But I will go, and you must

eat, if only for my sake, will you not ?” and Sister Florine kissed her fondly and descended to the supper room, where gathered around the tea-table was a refined-looking circle of boarders, and at its head a stately gentlewoman, who in her reduced circumstances, and enforced character of landlady, bore evident trace of better days, and gentle birth.

“ Mrs. Nesbit,” said Sister Florine, as she took one of the seats reserved for herself and Elenor, “ my ward will not come down to-night, as she is much fatigued by her journey ; please send her up one of your tempting waiters,” then turning to her neighbor, she led the conversation to other themes.

When Sister Florine returned, she found Elenor making quite a pretense of eating, though you could discover little diminution in the quantity so daintily spread before her. After the servant had removed the waiter, and they were once more alone, Elenor said :

“ Please, dear sister, take me away from here ; let us go far away, where no one will know us, and we shall never hear of this horrible story again.”

“ Well, dear, I have been thinking of that. I will see Mother Serena, and make one last effort, and if she still persists in her story, and refuses to give your guardian’s name and address, we will go abroad. I have long wished to travel, and if you will consent to go with, and be guided by me, your happiness shall henceforth be my dearest care ; and we will try to forget all this trouble, and leave everything in the hands of the good God who in His own time will bring light out of the darkness.”

“ Oh, how can I thank you, dear friend ! you have been my good angel in the past, and I gladly yield to your guidance my future life. But do not blame me if I cannot forget, or regain at once my cheerfulness, even you can never know what it has cost me—has cost me ?

“ ‘Sorrow endeth not when it seemeth done,’ and the struggle will still be fierce to resign all thought of Hugh, for I know he too will suffer as keenly as I do.”

“ Yes, Elenor, I can imagine the trial it is to both, but the barrier to your hopes may be removed sooner than you think. If not, as I said before, you are both young, and can afford to wait. In the meantime it will do you no harm to see something of the world ; so cheer up, my darling, and let us think of our European tour.”

“ But, sister, I have written to Hugh, and told him he was free. I did not think it right to hold him bound to me under the circumstances.”

“ You did perfectly right, but if he loves you, as you believe he does, he *will* wait. And now you are so tired, we must not talk any more to-night. Go to bed—I have letters to write to my business agent, for if my last effort fails with the Mother, I wish to leave with you, on the first steamer that sails for Liverpool.”

“ Thank God ! I think I can sleep with that hope to cheer me,” replied Elenor, with a brighter look than she had worn since the blow had fallen.

* * * * *

Sister Florine’s interview with the Mother was quite as unsatisfactory as all the former ones had been. All the threats and arguments she could bring to bear were of no avail, she still persisted in her story, and said, “ Nor will I give you her guardian’s name—you may do your worst, I defy you !” and the perplexed and distressed Sister Florine was fain to depart, no wiser than she came, but feeling that she had done all she could without resorting to the law. And even if that would have solved the problem, she did not wish to give publicity to a doubt concerning Elenor’s birth, so she was obliged to wait the developments of time to furnish a clew to the mystery.

Quickly were their preparations made, and the day

before Hugh reached Baltimore on his way to Linvale, the steamer Eureka sailed out of the harbor of New York, bearing Elenor away from the arms that were longing to enfold her in their strong clasp, and shield her from every trouble, and every danger !

Sister Florine had telegraphed to her cousin, Mr. Hamilton, a few hours before she sailed, of her departure for Europe (she had already apprised him of the probability of such a step, and intrusted to him some of her business affairs, etc.), accompanied by Miss Fane ; so that Hugh was soon in possession of the fact—for he had gone immediately to the Hamilton's on his arrival in Baltimore, but with the intention of remaining but a few hours. He covered his disappointment as best he could, and made some business engagement a plea for his hurried visit to the city ; and as soon as he could, without exciting remark, he turned his face homeward again, weary and heart-sick ; and feeling that all the brightness had gone out of his life, that happiness for him was a thing of the past !

He returned to Aspendale, looking so worn and haggard, that they were seriously alarmed about him, and his sister forgot her anger, forgot everything else, in her anxiety for her darling brother, and her efforts to soothe and cheer him. Even Col. Stacey was deeply concerned, as the days went by and nothing seemed to rouse or interest him, until they feared their bright, merry-hearted Hugh would sink into a confirmed melancholy. They advised his return to Savannah, hoping that in the excitement of business and society he might sooner recover his old cheerfulness ; but he was averse to going—in fact, shrank from all society even there, and wandered, moody, restless, and alone, amid the dear haunts and walks consecrated by the presence of his lost love, his dead hopes still clinging with ivy-like tenacity around the crumbling ruins of the fair castle he had thought so stately and enduring !

CHAPTER XX.

TARRYING but a few days in England and La Belle France, Sister Florine and Elenor hastened to spend the remaining months of winter in the more genial climate of Italy. The latter had recovered much of her former cheerfulness—she resolutely put away the dark shadow that enshrouded her life, determined to forget, if possible, its threatening ruin, and to rejoice in the glad sunshine, delicious skies, and glorious scenery of this land of enchantment.

They decided to spend the Christmas holidays in Rome, to witness the novel and splendid ceremonies, that are seen nowhere else in the world—so imposing and magnificent as in this “city of the past.”

Their road from Genoa to Pisa lay along the shore of the blue Mediterranean; now off in quiet, delicious valleys, smiling with picturesque cottages, lemon and orange groves; now up and down over torrents, and along dark precipices; now under long avenues of poplar and aspen and sycamores, festooned with vines, and past gardens and hedges of roses in full bloom, sweetening the air with the very sweetness of paradise. And then the sunsets! When the splendid lights on cloud and sea seemed God’s own transcendent glory made visible to man, when the very sky seemed to have descended and wrapped itself around the purple and golden hills; when heaven and earth seemed embracing in light, and blending in a bridal of beauty,” Elenor felt that “the vision of those mountains and valleys would never fade from her soul; that that sunlight

would stream through all her future life ; that that music of wave and tree would never wholly die on her ear ; that those roses would be a fragrant memory in her death chamber !” Even Hugh and his sufferings were forgotten, the horrible nightmare of apprehension in regard to her birth was dispelled, and she rejoiced in life and youth and health, while her soul went out in adoring gratitude to the great Creator of this grand panorama of sublimity and beauty !

Sister Florine enjoyed it in a more undemonstrative, but no less appreciative spirit, and was rejoiced to see the change wrought in the sorrow-stricken girl.

On their arrival in Rome, she made such pleasant arrangements for their sojourn, that they soon felt quite at home, and interested, with the aid of “Murray,” in laying out their plans for the future. But as they were barely in time for the Christmas holidays, they could do little else for the first week, but witness its impressive and gorgeous ceremonies, and listen to the sweet, solemn, grand music.

When the city became more quiet, they did not find time hang heavy on their hands ; each day was filled with pleasure, pure and elevating, with sights new and strange. The lovely walks and drives were a constant source of enjoyment ; every morning they greeted the rising sun from the noble Monte Pincio, and strolled in luxurious idleness beyond the Porta del Popolo, inhaling with silent, dreamy rapture the balmy air, and basking in the soft sunshine of this lovely land.

There was one quiet walk along the Tiber, that was Elenor’s favorite. Here she would sometimes wander alone (when she felt even the society of her friend a restraint) and muse in pensive sadness on the sweet, pure, tender love-dream that for a few short months had blessed her life, and seemed so enduring in its perfect, soul-satisfying com-

pleteness, but now—dissipated forever ! Nothing remained save its precious memory, *that* she felt, she knew, would never wholly die !

But rarely did she permit herself to dwell on the past, it was fraught with too much pain, awakened too keen regret.

She and Sister Florine would often attend vespers at the Trinita de Monte, a church on the Pincio, where the sweet singing of the nuns lifted her heart above earth's loves and sorrows, inspiring her with almost a divine renunciation of all its sin-tainted, uncertain pleasures, and wooing her to the safe seclusion those sweet singers had chosen.

And thus the time passed for the most part, swiftly and pleasantly to both, and brought healing on its wings, in her interested, ever-varied life, more rapidly to Elenor than to Hugh.

Sister Florine had as yet received letters only from her business agent and her cousin, Mr. Hamilton ; but now came a letter to Elenor from Hugh which had been forwarded by Sister Florine's agent in London (to whom she had written her friends in America to direct all their letters, and Mrs. Stacey had obtained the address from Mr. Hamilton). It was a touching appeal, pleading with her not to cast him off—to let him come to her, and give her the protection of his name, and the right to comfort her in every trouble ; that together they could be happy, far away from every whisper of the vile slander. He could not live without her, life held nothing that could compensate for her loss ; that if she would only say the word, he would soon be with her, never more to part, etc.

It was the first time Elenor had heard direct from Hugh, since she had known that they must part, and his earnest, noble letter stirred her soul to its very depths—it opened anew the floodgates of her pent-up sorrow, and lacerated afresh her cicatrized heart. She yearned, with an almost uncontrollable desire to bid him come, to dare,

and defy everything for her still faithful, devoted love ; but she was too noble to yield but a momentary assent to his proposition, or take advantage of his generosity, so she could only write in answer, as she had written before, and then sit down amid her ruined hopes, and fight anew the battle with her own heart for submission, and for strength to endure to the bitter end, hoping for peace at last.

* * * * *

The only thing that Hugh looked forward to with a ray of hope was Elenor's reply to his letter ; but weeks dragged their slow length along before it came, and then the last spark—not of love, would it had been—but of hope was extinguished in his bosom ; and he grew desperate, yes, and angry, that the noble girl would not suffer him to immolate himself on the altar of his love—a ready and willing victim ! “She no longer loves me,” he said, to his own heart, “or she could not so readily give me up—if I choose to brave all, what is that to her ? Why should she prevent me ? she does not love me as I do her.” Ah, can any man be made to understand the depth and purity and unselfishness of woman's love, that will sacrifice itself before it will bring wrong or reproach on the beloved object of its devotion—that will *die* and make no sign, rather than live less pure and stainless, in the eyes of him she adores ! Our hero, it seems, did not ; at least, not then—not in the first pangs of his second disappointment—but long after he knew how unjust he had been.

Mrs. Stacey's cherished plan was beginning to revive—the thought would intrude, “perhaps it is best so ; Hugh cannot mourn forever over his blighted hopes, and of course all thought of a union with Elenor is at an end, even he must see and feel this, and he may yet learn to love Ada.” Ah, Mrs. Stacey you forget love comes not at our bidding—in vain we court the influence of the capricious little god—like sleep, we woo in vain his potent touch,

his fickle presence ; but oft unknown does he enter and take possession of the heart, nor can our strongest efforts dislodge him from his throne !

But Mrs. Stacey trusted to time and propinquity to accomplish her darling wish, and she knew they were powerful allies ; in the meantime she inveigled Ada to Aspendale, and Hugh to Roselawn, whenever she could do so without exciting their suspicions as to any ulterior motive. True, her paramount and present aim was to cheer and interest Hugh, and wean him, if possible, from his useless repinings over his shattered hopes, for she really believed the gulf that now divided him from Elenor was as deep and wide, and far more impassable than the ocean that rolled between them ; and thought she was acting for his best interest and happiness to imbrue his mind with the hopelessness of cherishing any longer a thought of that poor unfortunate girl.

Col. Stacey might perhaps have exerted a counteracting influence, but he was absent from home a good deal during the winter—part of the time in Atlanta, winning golden opinions from his constituents, and the public generally, and eliciting the admiration and commendation of the older members of the legislature (to say nothing of the fairer portion of the assembly's audience) by his stern adherence to the principles of his party, and his earnest efforts for the best interest of his native State.

And so Mrs. Stacey labored unchecked, towards the consummation she so devoutly wished, and Hugh and Elenor, separated by sea and land, were slowly drifting farther apart—a more inexorable barrier was steadily rising in its awful reality between them ; e'er the truth should be revealed that would agonize both hearts with a pang of regret keener and more poignant than they had yet experienced when the sad refrain—"it might have been," would surge through their brain with maddening iteration !

CHAPTER XXI.

ONE soft April day, Hugh asked Ada to marry him. She was taken completely by surprise, and was silent from sheer astonishment for some moments ; at last she said :

“ Hugh, you do not love me—you still love Elenor—why not wait yet a little longer ? The truth may soon come out, and the difficulties that now prevent your union be removed. Were I to consent to what you ask, and the time should come when you could without hesitation marry the woman you love, you would hate me for having come between you ; no, let me still be your friend, and wait with patience for Elenor.”

“ I fear it is useless waiting, dear Ada, and I am miserable. If I can find solace and comfort in your love, you will not refuse me the boon, will you ? ”

“ No ; not if I knew that by marrying you I could add to your happiness, and if I thought you would never regret the step. But will my acceptance really make you happier ? ” asked Ada, with thrilling, anxious heart.

“ I most truly believe it will, dear friend, or I should not urge it.” Ada did not know, he hardly knew himself, how much more Hugh was thinking of her happiness than his own, or how entirely happiness now seemed out of the question as regarded himself, nor did he realize all his proposal to Ada involved, for “ a man may feel that his life is wrecked, yet until he has taken upon himself vows that must be performed, and bound himself to an allegiance that nothing but death can end, is he roused to the consciousness that all is over.” And Hugh felt it was but a

small thing for him to give his life to her who had so long given him all the love of her true heart ; the life, that had lost all its sweetness, and all its value to *him*. If it would secure this woman's happiness, was it not the best and noblest use to which he could devote it ? Poor Hugh ! he had missed the prize he coveted, and he was miserable—more wretched than he could endure. He who all his life long had seen every wish gratified—and he longed to be made happier, to forget, if possible, his disappointment ; and he honestly believed what he said, he thought Ada's pure affection would compensate for, and reconcile him, as nothing else could, to his great loss, while her happiness would be an aim for which to live.

After a long silence, in which Ada was trying to answer the question satisfactorily to her own heart, not that she doubted such a step would be greater joy than *she* had ever dared to hope for, but would she be right to take advantage of his offer, made she feared, in his despairing effort to attain some imaginable alleviation of his misery. At last, she said earnestly, and with tears in her sweet, violet eyes,

“ If it will do this, dear Hugh, and mind you answer me truly, as you have to give account at the last day, I will marry you ; for I had rather have the *second place in your heart, than the first place in the heart of any other man.*” How often Ada thought of this answer in the years that followed ; and wondered if there ever lived a woman *content* with the second place in a man's heart, at least, a man who holds the first place in hers.

“ Bless you for those words, dear friend. I do believe you can add greatly to my happiness, and comfort and cheer me, as no one else can ; and I will be a true, and tender husband to you, so help me God !” answered Hugh, with deep solemnity ; and he kept his vow, as far as mortal man could.

And so when the first breath of the May's soft, fragrant air caressed the flowers, Hugh and Ada were quietly married in the parlors at Roselawn, and Mrs. Stacey's life-long wish was gratified at last—but at what a fearful cost, she little dreamed.

As Hugh kissed the pure, pale face of his bride, a wild feeling of regret, a presentment of evil, at what he had done, came over him ; and he realized for the first time, that she whom he had vowed to love, he did not love ; and one, who was more than all the world beside, was now lost to him hopelessly, inexorably ! But Ada was so calmly happy, looked so like the angel of comfort and consolation she hoped to be to him, that he could not doubt for many moments the wisdom of the step he had taken. “ At least,” he said to himself, “ *she* will be happy, and I—can still endure.”

They intended to make Baltimore their home ; Hugh wanted to be far away from the theatre of his greatest happiness, and greatest sorrow, and he hoped in new scenes, and a new life, to be able to forget it all, and crush out the love that had been his blessing, but had now become his bane.

* * * * *

Col. Stacey alone regretted the marriage, and had grave fears for the ultimate happiness of both Hugh and Ada ; but he did not lift a finger to prevent it, if he could have done so, he felt it was not his right ; and after all it might prove for the best, yet he could not help wishing that Hugh had waited. And his heart yearned over the gentle, stricken girl who seemed to have dropped out of their lives, and out of their memories, and *this* he knew would be an added pang to what she was already enduring. He had also been thinking a good deal within the last few weeks of his ward and niece, poor Jack's daughter, and fancying it might be rather pleasant after all, to have her

in his lonely home ; and a few days before Hugh's marriage finding himself alone with his brother, he said :

“ Walter, I have determined to go and see after Jack's little girl—if her education is not finished it ought to be ; but every time I have hinted in my letters, at taking her away, the Mother would write me that Nellie was very anxious to remain longer, and complete such and such studies, so I have yielded ; but one thing I can but think strange—I have repeatedly written to Nellie, and begged her to write to me herself, but the Mother always makes some lame excuse for her, so I intend to go on at once, and bring her home willing, or unwilling.”

“ But you will wait until after Hugh's marriage, will you not ?” asked Walter.

“ Yes ; but I shall start the next day. I grow more impatient and apprehensive, the more I think of it, and fear I may regret having left her so long and so entirely in the hands of a stranger, for I promised Jack to be a father to her.”

“ Oh, she is well enough ; a convent is a safe place surely, and they are proverbially kind to children, I believe—but it was a strange fancy, his wanting her brought up in a convent.”

“ You know it was his wife's dying request—he was too good a Protestant to have desired it otherwise ; besides, you were unmarried at the time, and Jack knew our proud sister Ellen would not care to have the child of a *mesalliance* in her own family, so what could he do ? I fear she will be a confirmed Romanist.”

“ I expect so, but any way, I suppose you feel bound to take her when her education is finished ; but it is a great bother. I wish Jack had made a different marriage, poor fellow ! I hope she is a Stacey, and the plebeian blood may not be apparent ;” said Major Stacey, who had never seen this offspring of his brother's ill-fated marriage, and had

really known little of this black sheep of the family, "wild Jack Stacey," as he was called. Being the oldest son, he was off at college before the other two boys grew up, and when they in turn went, soon after Jack came home—before they were through, Jack had again left for his father's plantation in Louisiana; so they saw little of each other, still they retained in lively remembrance some of their oldest brother's wild escapades, and how they had always regarded him with a certain awe, not unmixed with admiration in their youthful minds.

Jack had been a great grief to his parents, for he was inclined to be dissipated, and they hoped a few years in the country would do much to reform his habits and tame him down.

While staying on his father's plantation, he frequented a little village near by, and there met a pretty French creole girl, whose father kept a drinking saloon, of which Jack was one of his best patrons. He often lingered to talk with the sprightly, dark-eyed Nora, and no doubt under the influence of her father's warmth-inspiring potations he did make love to the girl in a jesting way. Of this the cunning parents took advantage, and when Jack (as he told them at home, on the only visit he ever made afterwards) was more than usually under the influence of drink, they inveigled him into a marriage with their daughter. When he became sober, and found what had been done, he was nearly beside himself, but what could he do? The marriage was legal, and poor Nora, who was not a party to the deception practised, was so grieved and distressed, when she learned that Jack had not married her of his own free will, that he could not find it in his really good, tender heart to add to her distress by suing for a divorce. So he took her away with him, determined she should never hold any communication again with her parents or her former friends; and she was quite willing

to give up everything for Jack, whom she loved as truly and tenderly, as a high-born wife could have done. The serious consequences of his dissipated life, so roused, and brought him to reflection, that it made a steady man of him, for the few short years that he lived afterwards. And while the girl was not an entirely fit and congenial companion for him, yet she was so bright and loving—so willing to be taught by Jack, and anxious to become a more fitting mate for him, that he grew to love her more and more—and when their little daughter was born, Jack was almost happy; and would not have been ashamed to show his wife and child, to his proud family at Stacey Hall.

They both fell victims to that terrible scourge—yellow fever, when their only child—the little Nora, was four years old. When Jack, who survived his wife several weeks, found himself attacked, he wrote to his brother Fred, committing his child to his care, in the event of his death, and giving him all needful instruction in regard to his wishes concerning her, and begging him to come as soon as his letter reached him, which Fred Stacey did, but was too late to see poor Jack—he had been buried a week. He hastened to the asylum for infants where his brother's letter informed him he had placed his little girl, and took her immediately away to the convent, also named in the letter, as the one in which Jack desired her to be placed. The child had been named for her mother, and Jack's only sister—Ellen Nora, but blended into one name, and written—Elenora. But her father always called her Nellie—thus he named her in his letters to his brothers, and as Nellie, Col. Stacey always thought, and spoke of her.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE morning after Hugh's marriage, saw Col. Stacey on his way North to carry out his design with regard to his niece, who had so long been left in the seclusion of a convent-school. He only stopped a few hours with his sister in Baltimore, promising to remain longer on his return with their brother's daughter.

"You will be glad to see Jack's little girl, will you not Ellen?" he asked Mrs. Hamilton, though he knew she had never taken much interest in the child.

"Yes, I should like to see her for her father's sake. I hope we shall have no cause to be ashamed of her, but I fear I can never love her much, or feel that she is so nearly related to us. How old is she, Fred?"

"I think she was about four years old when her father died—that has been twelve or thirteen years—she must be at least, seventeen now. I cannot realize it, I was expecting to see a child, but she must be quite a young lady—nearly grown, I should think."

"Certainly, she is older than Stacey, I remember. And so you are really going to take her home with you? It will be a great care and responsibility for a single man, Fred—you ought to marry, if only for the girl's sake," said his sister, watching anxiously the effect of her remark, for she knew it was a tabooed subject with him.

"I think I shall like the responsibility," he replied; "I find myself growing very anxious to see her, and have her to brighten my lonely home."

"Yes, Fred, lonely, because you will have it so.—Many

a noble, fair woman would be glad to share it with you, but you still

‘Sigh for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still.’

This is wrong, my dear brother ; I do so wish you would marry ; I think you would be happier.”

“I am not unhappy, Ellen ; and I have never seen but one woman whom I thought for a moment, could fill my lost darling’s place, and she loved another—so you see my loneliness is not altogether my fault,” replied Col. Stacey, smiling kindly, and not in the least disturbed by his sister’s suggestion in regard to marriage.

“By the way, Fred, I was very sorry Walter lost his governess. Her health failed, Eveline wrote us, and she seemed rather glad to have some excuse for taking the girl abroad—she is very much devoted to her, and Stacey fell quite in love with her at the Springs. Do you think her so very attractive ?

“I think her unusually lovely, and lovable, and I am very glad she has such a friend as your cousin,” replied her brother.

“Stacey thought Hugh was in love with her, though I suppose he was mistaken, as he has married Ada Singleton ; but you have not told me anything about the wedding.—I hear they are coming to Baltimore to live ; is that so ?”

“I believe it is, but I must go.—I will tell you everything you wish to know on my return, which will be as soon as I possibly can.—Good-by.”

As Col. Stacey sped along over the same route that he had travelled so long ago, with the little, dark gipsy-looking child, who clung to him fondly, calling him *père*—so striking was his resemblance to her father, whom they had left sleeping under the soft skies of Louisiana—he thought

remorsefully of his neglect, and his conscience reproached him, that he had not before looked after the child in person—and he was moved with a strange yearning to see, and clasp her in his protecting arms, that he had never felt before, in all the years that were past; and mingled with this feeling, was a foreboding of ill, he could not suppress, or account for. The journey seemed interminable—but at last, the little village of Farnham was in sight.

Col. Stacey hardly tarried long enough at his hotel to rest and freshen his toilet, when he hastened to the convent of the Sacred Heart. He handed his card to the servant who answered the bell, and waited impatiently in the reception room. Very soon a meek, gentle-looking woman made her appearance.

“Mother Serena, I suppose I have the pleasure of addressing,” he said with quiet dignity, as he rose from his seat. “I have come for my niece—Nellie Stacey; let me see her immediately, if you please.”

“I am not Mother Serena, Col. Stacey, and your niece is not here; Mother Serena took her with her to St. Josephs, in Linvale, when she took charge of that convent seven or eight years ago,” replied the meek-looking Mother.

“But her letters to me have been dated and mailed from this place always,” returned Col. Stacey, astonished and bewildered.

“Yes, she has always sent them here under cover, for me to post for her, and I received, and sent her yours in the same way. I always thought it strange, but she gave as her reason, that it would prevent confusion, and she did not wish you to know she had removed the child without your consent—though she did not think you would care.”

“The miserable woman! she knew I *would* care, and that is the reason she concealed it. She shall explain this

thing—there is some mystery ; I feared as much. Where is Linvale, Mother, and how far from here ?”

“About fifty miles by rail.”

“Well, this is certainly provoking—when I expected to find my niece here, to have to post off again in search of her ; and the woman may have made away with her altogether.”

“No danger of that,” replied the Mother, smiling at his fears. “you will find her all right, no doubt. Mother Serena is rather stern and overbearing, but her character and position, are at stake ; and the first is above suspicion.”

“*This* is a strange freak, at any rate, and has rather a dark look, but I trust it can be satisfactorily explained—Good day ! and thank you for the trouble I have given you,” and Col. Stacey hurried away to catch the first train that would take him to Linvale.

When he reached the place, a larger, and more pretentious town than Farnham, he took a carriage at the depot, and bid the driver to take him at once to St. Joseph’s. Telling the man to wait for him, as he stopped before the high enclosure of a large, but dreary-looking brick building—he went in, through the heavy iron gate, that at that hour was not locked. He would not send his card, but bid the servant or nun, who opened the door—

“Tell the Mother that a gentleman wishes to see her immediately, on very important business.”

The woman that very soon entered, bore little resemblance to the meek Mother of The Sacred Heart—she was haughty—and imperious-looking, with little of the odor of sanctity about her ; and had she not grown stouter and older, Col. Stacey, would scarcely have recognized in her the woman in whose care he placed the little child so long ago.

“Are you Mother Serena ?” he asked, with as much sternness as the suave Col. Stacey could address a woman—bowing slightly.

"I am," she replied with equal *hauteur*.

"And I am the uncle of Miss Stacey," he returned, as he watched her keenly, and saw that she paled at the announcement, "I have come for my niece; bring her to me at once!"

"Ah—most happy to see you, Col. Stacey; but sorry to be obliged to tell you, that your niece is not here;" she said, recovering her color and composure.

"Not here! what do you mean? My niece not here—where is she? tell me instantly!" exclaimed the now seriously alarmed and excited man.

"Calm yourself, Col. Stacey, and I will tell you—there is no cause for alarm. Your niece has gone abroad for the present, but she is in good hands. She left the convent entirely against my wish and command about a year and a half ago, and returned in delicate health, when Sister Florine, a nice and wealthy lady, took her to Italy for the benefit of the climate, thinking—"

"Sister Florine! why Miss Fane went abroad with her—Elenor Fane, my brother's governess—what name, woman! was Elenor Fane my niece? Say, speak! cannot you tell me?"

"I know nothing of Elenor Fane. Your niece, Elenora Stacey (I believe her middle name was Fane) went South as a governess; she returned last winter in delicate health, Sister Florine told me, I did not see her, and has gone to Europe with the sister, or Eveline Howard, as she is known to the world."

"She is—she must be the same! Idiot that I was not to have known it. And the strange resemblance, too; I see it all now, too late! fool, fool that I have been! It was that magnetic tie of blood which drew me to her all the time—my darling, my dead brother's child!" all this he murmured to himself, in a sort of dreamy way, for he was indeed almost stunned and stupefied, as the truth dawned on

his bewildered brain. And then there came to him with lightning swiftness, another thought, that roused him.

“Woman ! fiend ! what have you done ! Oh, dearly shall you rue this ;” he exclaimed, turning fiercely on her, “for you lied wilfully, maliciously. You knew not a drop of slave-blood coursed through her veins—you knew she was my brother’s child, born in holy wedlock. Why did you put forth this wicked lie to blight her life, and render her miserable—tell me why ? You had some motive surely—you could not be so heartless, else.”

“No, I really believed it, she was such a dark little thing when you brought her to me, that I thought you were concealing the real truth ; indeed, I did, Col. Stacey—I hope you will pardon the error—I knew such things often happened in the South ; and—”

“Woman ! you make me forget myself, and what is due to the sex you disgrace—I will never forgive you, and dearly shall you pay the penalty of your wickedness. You may prepare to render a strict account of how the liberal allowance I sent you every year, was spent (beside refunding what you have obtained by fraud, since she left your care).—I know it was not expended on my niece—for I have heard her tell how she was stinted in every way—I have learned all your treachery to the child I committed to your care, when she did not know I was her uncle. And if you had not driven her to it, by your cruelty, and by withholding from her—for your own vile purposes—all knowledge of me, she would never have resorted to the means she did, to be free from you ; and the suppression of her name, for fear of being discovered by her guardian, whom you had taught her to dread. Oh, I loathe the very sight of such a cruel, pitiless monster, in the form of a woman ! I shall see a lawyer at once, and put him in possession of the facts and prosecute you for obtaining money under false pretences and for slander.”

“Oh, Col. Stacey, be merciful ! You surely will not do this—remember my holy calling and position here. “Do not ruin me, I entreat you ; I was honest in my belief—I—”

“Stop ! do not add sin to sin.—‘What measure ye mete shall be measured to you again,’ and may God have mercy on you, for I shall not.” Col. Stacey caught up his hat, and almost rushing from the house, entered the carriage, telling the man to drive him as rapidly as he could to the office of the most prominent lawyer in the place. As he was whirled along, the strong man groaned in spirit, when he thought of all his neglect had brought on this bright young creature ; and if he had loved Elenor before, how infinitely dearer she seemed to him now that he knew she was his own flesh and blood—Jack’s little daughter !

“Wait !” he said again to the driver, (who by this time had begun to wonder if the man was not an escaped lunatic) when they drew up in front of the lawyer’s office, who was soon listening with professional interest to Col. Stacey’s story. “Bring her to justice, to punishment,” he said as he rose to go, “you shall be well paid ;” then he hurried back to the depot to catch the first return train to Baltimore. “Perhaps I can learn her exact whereabouts from Howard,” he thought, and every moment seemed an age until he could see the dear girl, and remove the dark shadow, he had been instrumental in causing to rest on her young life.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN Col. Stacey again reached Mrs. Hamilton's he looked as though ten years had been added to his life. "Fred! what on earth is the matter with you?" exclaimed his sister, as soon as he entered, "are you ill—or is anybody dead?"

"Yes, I am ill, and wretched;" he said, sinking exhausted on a sofa,

"Gracious, Fred! have you killed anybody—or broken the decalogue in some other way?—tell me, I entreat you!" continued Mrs. Hamilton, half in jest—though she was really concerned to see her calm and dignified brother so entirely unlike himself—but not a suspicion of any real trouble crossed her mind.—"And where is the child?" she added, as the thought flashed on her, that he was to have brought her with him.

"Ah, where?" he echoed. "Ellen, do you know in what part of Europe your cousin is now?"

"I think still in Rome—though I am not sure—perhaps Howard can tell—but why, Fred?"

"Do you know that the girl who calls herself Elenor Fane, is your own niece—Jack's daughter?—the little child I put in a convent-school so long ago, and left to the tender mercies of a fiend!"

"Fred! you certainly are mad—what do you mean?" asked his sister perfectly aghast.

"I mean just what I say; and I feel as if I should go mad, if I cannot see her soon, and repair in part, the wrong I have done—but, God forgive me! the greatest is beyond repairing, now, do you wonder that I am wretched?"

“But, Fred, it seems incredible, that the girl should have been in Walter’s family so long, and none of you discover her identity—are you sure there is no mistake?”

“I am sure :—and it does look incredible—as you say—but you see the change, or suppression of her full name, averted all suspicion ; beside, I had always thought of the child as—*Nellie*, and had really forgotten that her middle name was, *Fane*. And, would you believe it ? the miserable woman actually removed her to another convent, in Linvale, (fifty miles away from where I first placed her) which she took charge of six or seven years ago—yet her letters to me were sent from Farnham, and she wrote as if my niece were still at the convent of the Sacred Heart. And would say in all her letters that *Nellie* was doing well, but anxious to pursue a more extended course of study and especially, perfect herself in music—and I, rather rejoicing in her ambition, made myself easy—thinking, ‘a year or so longer of study will do her no harm—she is full young to leave school ;’ and so feeling sure *Nellie* was where I had placed her, how could I dream for a moment, that she could be in two places, *at the same time?*”

“That is true ; but why did she suppress her name, Fred ? It is her fault at last, it seems, that you did not discover her identity ;” said Mrs. Hamilton.

“Yes, but I do not blame her under the circumstances, nor will you. That woman, besides being unkind to her, had inspired her with a great dread of her guardian, (not telling her that he was also her uncle) whom she taught her to look upon as her greatest enemy—and Elenor having reason to believe her guardian resided at the South, took this method to prevent discovery by him, and being forced to return to the convent, which she deprecated above all things.—I feel sure this was her reason, gathered from what I have heard her say in regard to the matter—though, of course, she did not mention the fact, of the suppressed name.”

"Poor child ! but why did she leave her situation as governess, Fred—was ill-health really the cause ?"

"Now comes in the crowning act of falsehood and villany, perpetrated by that monster of cruelty.—No ; ill-health was not the cause. Elenor was engaged to be married to Hugh, and they were devotedly attached to each other, but before she gave herself to any man in marriage, she wanted to know all about her parentage, and who her guardian was, that she might communicate with him, (for that wretch had persistently concealed, all knowledge of both from her, saying it was her guardian's wish, for the present) and inform him of the important steps she contemplated—this information gained, she would then, I imagine, have told Hugh her full name. She wrote to Sister Florine to get this information, and write to her at once, telling her also of her intended marriage. The Sister did this, or tried to, but the woman still refused to give her guardian's name, but said as to her birth—Elenor was the child of her guardian's brother by a quadroon slave—in other words, the offspring of shame, with negro blood in her veins !"

"O Fred ! how infamous ! how very wicked ! she ought to be prosecuted to the bitter end—the wretched creature ! What did you do with her, Fred ?"

"Nothing yet, the law will have to take its course. I have attended to that. Well, the shock consequent on the terrible revelation, nearly killed Elenor. She gave up her position as governess, wrote and released Hugh from his engagement, and returned to make further effort to discover the truth or falsehood of the statement ; I conclude with no success, as your cousin took her away to Europe, and she refused, to the last, (in a letter he received from her since she has been abroad) to marry Hugh until the mystery is made clear—dear, noble girl !"

"But did Hugh, did the rest of you believe it was true ?"

"No, of course not ; at least Hugh and I did not, but

I think Lily and Walter feared it was, and the girl believed it herself. Hugh followed her, you remember he came here soon after she had left Aspendale, and learned she had sailed for Europe ; that was his object, to urge her to marry him, which he has done, as I said, by letter, only to find her firm in her refusal so long as a doubt remained. And now, he is lost to her forever ! O Ellen ! I shall never forgive myself—and to think we were such idiots as not to suspect she was our niece, when too, we all remarked the wonderful likeness to our mother—how blind we were ! But it does seem now, when it all looks so plain, that ‘our eyes were holden, that we should not see.’ I felt strangely drawn to her from the first, and loved her as I believed, with a different love, which she did not return—thank God ! that she did not—and *she* was the *one woman*, I told you, I had thought could fill my lost darling’s place. You have never seen her, Ellen ?”

“No ; but Eveline cannot say enough in her praise ; and Stacey thinks her lovely in mind and person.”

“I do not wonder at it, for she is one of the loveliest of God’s creatures, and as good as she is lovely,” returned Col. Stacey.

“But, Fred, it is strange Hugh should have forgotten her so soon, and married another.”

“He did not forget her—so much the worse—and he never will forget her now, I fear.—But, Lily, gave him no rest—she and Walter too, urged him to marry Ada, thinking he would be happier ; and he believed Elenor was lost to him anyway—poor fellow ! I fear his remorse will be terrible, when he learns the truth, which I must write to them at once. Walter must know, but it is hard to tell them, and disturb Hugh and Ada in their new-found happiness. The consequences of that woman’s falsehood will never end—it is terrible ! Ellen, I shall sail by the first steamer for Europe. I will leave for New York in the

morning, and must write several letters to-night. Where are your young folks, and when will Howard be in?"

"I am looking for Howard every moment. — I don't know what can be detaining him. Stacey and Maud went out driving, but it is time they had returned. Will you go up to your room, Fred, or shall I bring writing material here? But you need refreshing, you have not brushed the dust off you, and you look so worn out; let me send you a glass of wine?"

"Thank you, I believe it will do me good—and I will go to my room—I must be alone. I can get funds from Howard, I suppose, Ellen, and give him an order on my banker in Augusta. I must go to the dear child at once; and I hope the good news I shall carry her, will compensate in some measure for the sad tidings, that death alone can remove the barrier that *now* separates her from Hugh. I shall not come down again, Ellen, until the tea-bell rings—Howard will be in by that time."

"O yes:—I will send James with the wine, and water for your bath, make him do anything else you, wish—but, Fred, did you bring clothing enough for a European tour?"

"My valise is pretty well packed, and I can easily supply myself with anything that is lacking—that is a matter of little difficulty, with a well-filled purse, which is the *first* consideration, in such an undertaking."

"Do lie down and rest yourself a little, Fred, before you begin writing. I fear you will not be equal to your journey, if you do not look better to-morrow; I know I shall feel anxious about you."

"Oh, I shall be all right when this trouble is over—but I cannot *rest* much, I fear, until I clasp the dear child to my heart, and hear her say, that I am forgiven—and see the shadow lifted from her sweet face, when she learns, that she can hold up her head with the proudest in the land;" returned Col. Stacey, as he rose to leave the room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HUGH and Ada did not leave for the North for a week or more after their marriage, as their parting with their dear ones of home was to be a long one—for on their return from their bridal tour to Niagara and the Lakes, they intended to set up housekeeping in Baltimore. Mrs. Stacey had written to her sister-in-law to be on the lookout for a pretty suburban villa for them, as Hugh intended to purchase; and begged that Mr. Hamilton would aid them in making a selection, also that she would make some effort to introduce Ada to her “dear, five hundred friends.”

And Hugh might have been more hopeful, and happier in contemplating, and laying plans, for their future, but before they got off, Col. Stacey's letter came, telling his brother that Elenor Fane was their niece—Jack's daughter; also of his intention to sail at once for Europe, to find her, and remove the terrible doubt regarding her birth, from her mind.

“When I will return,” the letter went on to say, “I do not know. Of course, I shall bring Elenor back with me, to the home that will henceforth be hers. I leave everything in your care, and Williams', feeling assured you both will do everything for the best. I will write as soon as I find the dear child, for until I do, my quest will not end.” And then followed some business details, as to funds, etc., in which my readers would not be interested.

“O Hugh!” exclaimed Ada, as soon as he told her, on his return from Aspendale, where he happened to be when Major Stacey received the letter, “if you had only waited,

as I wished you to do ! Now you will be sorry all your life." And she leaned her head on his shoulder to conceal her tears, the first she had shed since her short, happy widowhood ; but ah, poor Ada, not the last !

"Do not say that, my dear, and do not think it ; have I not vowed to be a true and faithful husband to you, and can you not trust me, Ada ? he asked, putting his arm tenderly around her.

"Yes, I do—I will, trust you, dear Hugh, for you are good, and noble above all other men," she answered, smiling through her tears. "And I am truly glad that Elenor can rejoice in the proud consciousness, that she has the best blood in the country in her veins—on one side, at least. She will be happy now, and any man may be proud to win her.

Can you blame Hugh, that the thought of any other man winning her, his peerless Elenor stabbed him like a knife ? But he gave no sign, and kept a brave and smiling face towards his wife, who was surprised and glad, that he could speak so calmly of the girl whom *now*, had he been free—he could have married without shame. He stood silent a few moments—clasping his wife—but he could bear it no longer, and said hastily—

"My dear, we must really be off, I have been an idler too long, and now that I have a wife depending on me, must go to work in earnest—when can you be ready to leave ?"

"Any time you wish, Hugh ; the parting with my dear ones must come, and deferring it, will not make it less painful. 'Where thou goest, I will go ; where thou diest, I will die ; and there will I be buried' ;" quoted Ada, putting her arm around her husband's neck, and looking into his beautiful blue eyes (poor Elenor had loved them so !) that did not quail beneath her searching glance, though his heart was almost bursting with its tumult of emotion—

for which he hated himself, and would have died rather than had his gentle, trusting wife to know.

“Well, let us fix on the day after to-morrow,” he said, releasing her. “I am going to your father’s office on a little matter of business, and will tell him. You can amuse yourself with packing your *trousseau* until dinner, and then we can drive over and let Lily know.”

But Hugh did not go at once to Dr. Singleton’s office—which was in one corner of the grounds, and fronted on the highway or street. Turning into a secluded bower that he passed on his way, he seated himself, and leaning his head on the rustic bench, strove with a mighty effort to still the storm that raged in his heart, and banish the torturing fiend of regret. “O Lily!” he mourned, “what have you done! You, and my own weak yielding, and lack of strength to endure, have caused me to sin against my own heart—against the woman I have lost forever, and her, whom I have vowed to love ‘until death do us part’—but she, poor child, must never know—and yet—O God! how can I endure this lingering torture!”

“Beating it in upon his weary brain,
As tho’ it were the burden of a song,
Not to tell her, never to let her know,”

He prayed for strength to put away all thought of the woman who might have been his wife, but whom now it was *a sin*, to love!

* * * * *

Hugh and Ada remained long enough in Baltimore to select their home; and Mrs. Hamilton gave them an elegant reception, at which the *élite* of the city were present. Hugh had no cause to feel ashamed of his bride, even in that aristocratic assembly. She wore her bridal-dress of rich white silk, with an over-dress of *tulle*—and a full set of pearls—necklace, ear-rings, etc., (Hugh’s wedding gift),

and they did not look purer than the pale, delicate woman they adorned ; for while Ada could not strictly be called beautiful, she was so fair and refined looking, that she called forth the admiration of many of Mrs. Hamilton's most fastidious guests. Hugh, to the casual observer was calmly and quietly happy, and made quite as pleasant an impression as his wife. And yet, even amid that gay throng, his thoughts would occasionally stray beyond his control, and he found himself thinking how Elenor would queen it, in society so congenial to her taste, and how every woman (even far-famed Baltimore beauty) would pale, by contrast with her regal loveliness. But he hastily banished such foes to his peace, and laid himself out to play the agreeable to some of the older members of the Baltimore bar, and so successfully that Mr. Randal (an old bachelor, and head of the bar) said to Mr. Hamilton during the evening :

" Did I understand you to say that Mr. Legare intends to make Baltimore his home for the future ?"

" Yes : he will remain here on his return from their northern tour. He has bought that pretty new villa on — Street, built by Archer & Co. I hope you will do what you can for him Randal, as a brother lawyer—as he is a stranger here," replied Mr. Hamilton.

I will ; for I am greatly impressed in his favor. You know my partner has just gone to 'Frisco, to make his fortune faster than he could do here—and I believe I will propose to your young relative to take his place, eh ?"

" I should be very glad, as that would introduce him at once into a practice—though he would be sure to succeed in time, for he was rapidly rising in his profession in Savannah. He is not a relative of mine, however, only a connection—his sister married my wife's brother—Major Walter Stacey," returned Mr. Hamilton.

" Ah—I think his wife very attractive ;" said the head

of the Baltimore bar, with the taste and appreciation that few of his legal brethren would have given him credit for, as he was looked upon by them as a sort of woman-hater, caring little for anything that did not aid, or further his ambitious ends, which did not stop short of the topmost round of the ladder of fame and fortune. "I always admired," he continued, "those pure, ethereal looking women; they seem akin to the angels, and make a man feel pure, 'by being purely shone upon.'"

"Yes, she is a very sweet woman, too, and seems perfectly devoted to her handsome husband; but Randal, my wife has a niece, who is now in Europe, that they say—I have never seen her—is the most beautiful woman of this age—Fred Stacey (you remember Fred?) has just sailed in search of her—it is quite a romantic story—" and Mr. Hamilton proceeded to give his friend, the outlines of Elenor's life; also the fraud practised by the Mother—but omitting any allusion to Hugh's engagement to her. Mr. Randal listened with deep interest; excited often to exclamations of — "infamous!" "terrible!" "why she's a regular female Caligula!—didn't Stacey take justice in his own hand?" etc.

"And I tell you what, Randal, when she bursts upon our aching sight, (Fred's going to bring her here) even you old bachelors will have to place a double guard around the stronghold of your adamantine hearts—they say everybody succumbs to her charms, and lays down their arms at the first encounter," continued Mr. Hamilton, who was one of the few men from whom Mr. Randal would bear, with impunity—any jesting on such themes as love or marriage, when applied to him personally.

"I don't know, Howard; as for beauty, I've seen a great deal in my life—and tastes differ; besides, as you know, all such things ceased to move me long ago—not that I cannot still admire a beautiful woman—I hope

never to be so fossilized as that and even entertain for them a sincere friendship ; but *love* !—

‘ Once only, o’er my sunless course,
Hath light from Heaven and Love been shed ;
That ray was bliss—its warmth, delight,
Too bright it blazed, then flickering—fled ! ’ ”

CHAPTER XXV.

WE will leave the safely married pair and follow the impatient man steaming across the Atlantic—but not half fast enough for his eager, longing heart. A hundred times in imagination, had he clasped Elenor in his arms, exclaiming—“ My poor injured darling ! my dear niece—Jack’s neglected orphan ! can you ever forgive your unhappy uncle ? ” And although it was Col. Stacey’s first trip across the ocean, and he was usually a keen, observant traveller—losing nothing of interest or improvement—yet now, he was so absorbed in remorseful thoughts of the dear, wronged, girl—for whose troubles he too severely blamed himself, that he was not the pleasant, genial companion, he would otherwise have been, in the isolated weariness of a sea-voyage.

When he reached Liverpool, his first efforts were directed to finding out when he could leave it, and he was very soon on his way towards Rome, where he arrived on a lovely day during the last week in May. Much to his chagrin, Sister Florine and Elenor had left several weeks before for Naples. Thither he followed, as fast as the vetturino could be bribed by extra fare to take him ; and in a much shorter time than the journey is usually performed, he

reached the bright, gay Neapolitan city, which held the dear object of his search.

The hotel that Sister Florine (or Miss Howard, as we will call her for the future) had chosen, was delightfully situated on the Chiaja, separated only by the beautiful Royal Garden, from the glorious bay. To-day, it is raining, and she and Elenor are kept in-doors, much to the latter's disgust, who is sitting at the window of their pleasant parlor, watching the rain as it freshens and makes more vivid the green terraces and lovely garden—her thoughts reverting to the past, as they did not often do now, with so much to interest and divert them. Miss Howard was busy writing letters, and was rather glad she was not tempted by a fine day, longer to postpone them.

"Sister!" said Elenor, rising hastily, "there is a gentleman coming up the walk that looks strangely like Col. Stacey, but that is impossible!" He neared the portico and looking up, caught Elenor's eye. "It is—it is he!" she cried, and rushed down the stairs to the open door, where Col. Stacey met her, and clasping her in his arms exclaimed—

"O Elenor! my dead brother's child—my darling, precious niece—I have found you at last, thank God!" She tried to extricate herself from his encircling arms, for she thought the grave, dignified man she had known, must have suddenly gone mad—

"Col. Stacey, what do you mean?" she gasped, still tightly clasped in the arms that would not let her go. "Please release me."

"My darling, it is true! you are my own neglected little niece," and he rained tears and kisses together, on the sweet, up-turned face. "Take me where we can be alone, and I will explain everything to you." And Elenor, still too much astonished and bewildered to return his tender greeting, led him into one of the more private parlors and

closed the door. He seated himself beside her on a sofa, still keeping an arm about her, as though he feared she might in some way elude him even yet, and then he told her *all*!

Now she was shedding tears of joy—the first, and sweetest thought that rushed over her was—“I can marry my darling, at last!”

“But, my child,” her uncle continued, after a pause, for he hesitated to crush her new-found joy—“I have sad news to tell you also, and you must try to bear it nobly, as you have borne that which, had it been true, would have been infinitely more terrible!”

“O, Col. Stacey! is it Hugh? is he dead?” she managed to gasp.

“No, oh no, Hugh is well;” he hastened to say, as he saw the look of wild alarm in her eyes; and his heart almost failed him, to tell her the bitter truth, when he saw how still above all others, he was first in her thoughts. “But do not call me Col. Stacey—I am Uncle Fred, from this time forth, my dear niece—my own sweet daughter—whom it shall be my dearest object in the future to render happy, and thus atone in some measure for all I have made her suffer. No, dear, Hugh is not dead, save to you—he is married—to Ada Singleton.”

Col. Stacey felt her start, and shiver—then throwing her arms for the first time, around his neck, she wept bitter tears—far more bitter, than any she had yet shed—for her lost—and what was worse—her faithless lover! while she murmured—“Forgotten so soon! O God! must I be miserable always!”

“My child! do not grieve so; you have found so much, cannot you give up Hugh?”

“O uncle! *he* was more than all the world to me—what is name or birth or anything, since he is lost more inexorably than before!” she cried, unable to control her emotion.

“He was not much to blame, dear Elenor. Lily and

Walter gave him no rest—they urged the step, thinking, he would sooner recover from the disappointment of losing you, which I assure you was terrible. I never saw anyone suffer as he did, when he followed you to urge you to marry him in spite of all, and learned you had sailed for Europe. I really feared for his reason, for many weeks; and even later, when he received your letter from Rome, he was almost crushed, for he felt then, that all was indeed over. I have grave fears for his happiness when he shall learn the truth—and you must be brave and help him to bear it—for if he sees you cheerful and contented, it will do much to reconcile him to his fate.”

“I hope, dear uncle, he may be happy; and I will try to be—for your sake,” replied Elenor, as she lifted her tearful face from his shoulder, and tried to smile—“but I must go and tell Sister Florine the good news—how I have found my mysterious guardian and uncle in one, and that the dark shadow is lifted in regard to my birth—how she will rejoice!”

“When I have made myself more presentable, I wish to see the good woman, who has been so kind to you, my dear,” said her uncle, as she rose to leave him.

“Oh yes! how good, I can never tell you—and what she has been to me in this trouble—but for her, I could not have borne it. When you are ready, make the servant show you to our private parlor, and don’t be too long, dear uncle, I feel as if it were all a dream, and that you may vanish out of my sight at any moment; I can hardly realize while I see you—that you are indeed my dead father’s brother—my own uncle Fred!” and Col. Stacey kissed her again, before he could let her go.

“Rejoice with me, dear sister,” said Elenor as she entered the room, where Miss Howard had quietly resumed her writing, when she found that young lady did not re-

turn after her hasty exit ; “ I have found my guardian ! And he is also my uncle, and would you believe it—it is Col. Stacey ! ”

“ Nellie ! what do you mean ? ” asked her friend, thoroughly puzzled.

“ Oh, it is true, dearest, *true* ! and the lonely orphan you have befriended can hold up her head with the proudest in the land ! Yes, Col. Stacey, and his brother, in whose family I lived so long, unknown, are my father’s brothers, and I was born in holy wedlock, and am not the child of a slave, as that wicked woman said ! ” And Elenor kneeled by the low couch on which her friend sat, and leaning her head on that faithful bosom, shed tears of mingled joy and sorrow.

“ Oh, my child ! I do indeed rejoice and thank God, and our sweet Mother, that light has come at last !—did I not say it would be so ? Will you ever doubt God’s goodness again ? But why do you weep ? This is no time for tears, my darling—dry your eyes, and tell me all about it ; ” said Mrs. Howard putting aside her writing—and drawing Elenor to a seat by her side, encircled her slender form with a loving pressure, as the sorrowing girl told her of all she had lost, as well as gained.

“ My poor darling ! it does seem hard that your cup of joy must have this bitter drop,” said the sympathizing woman, when Elenor had finished the sad part of her communication. “ But, my dear, it is ever thus in this world—nothing is perfect—earth were too like Heaven, if this were so.—No, there is always something to remind us that ‘ there is nothing *true* but Heaven ! ’ And, my dear child, try not to grieve—you have gained so much—”

“ O sister ! in losing Hugh, I seem to have lost all—everything, worth living for ! ” interrupted the poor girl, passionately.

“ Say not so, dear Nellie—rebel not, my darling ; God

has permitted it—in His wisdom, it may be just the discipline you need—light will shine on this at last, as it shone on the other dark cloud, now illumined by His smile! Cheer up, my drooping flower—lift your head and rejoice in the sunshine left you—and ‘let the dead past bury its dead!’”

But Elenor felt there were many things in that past that would never die—that she could never bury—and would not, if she could.—So she only said,

“My uncle would like to see you, sister, as soon as he has rested, and refreshed himself—he is very weary, for he has not stopped longer than was absolutely necessary, since he left the steamer at Liverpool.

Col. Stacey was not prepared to see the still young, and refined-looking woman, that rose to greet him, as he entered, a few hours later, the private parlor where the two awaited him with anxious hearts.

“Miss Howard,” he said, taking her hand in a cordial grasp, “I am most happy to make the acquaintance of the kind friend and benefactress of my dear niece. How shall I ever thank you for all you have been to her—while I have—unintentionally, it is true, but none the less culpably—neglected her, and suffered this terrible wrong to befall her!”

“Nay, Col. Stacey, do not blame yourself so severely—say rather, that He, who cannot err, has permitted it all for some wise purpose, that we know not perfectly as yet, though even now, we can see some good resulting from Nellie’s rather wild escapade—the way has been opened to the hearts of her relations, all hard thoughts of her guardian removed from her mind, and each has known and loved the other, even as strangers. And our sojourn abroad is another result attained—through great tribulation—but not profitless, I trust.”

“Yes,” replied Col. Stacey—“that is all true; and I hope my darling’s trials are over, and when she is weary of travel, she shall return to the home of her father, and to the anxious hearts that are waiting to receive her with more than the love of kindred—longing to atone for all the suffering she has endured! Oh, my child! dearly have you paid for your incognito!” said Col. Stacey.

“Yes, dear uncle, that is true—yet I only regret one thing—but no, not even *that*, for—

‘Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than *never* to have loved at all,’”

said Elenor.

“My dear, you cannot reconcile me to the part I have had in your suffering; and I shall not be able to forgive myself, until I know that you are entirely happy again, and regret *nothing* in the past that my neglect has indirectly caused;” said Col. Stacey, lifting the sweet face that had drooped, and smoothing fondly the pale, velvety cheek.

“I will not have you reproach yourself, uncle Fred—how could you know that miserable woman was writing you falsehoods all the time? The most difficult thing for me, will be to forgive her,” said Elenor.

“You must do even that, my child, or how can you pray to be forgiven your trespasses?” said Miss Howard.

“I don’t know, sister—but I certainly cannot from my heart forgive that woman yet—but do look, uncle! the sun is coming out to welcome you, and is not the bay lovely? Oh, shall we not enjoy having uncle to take care of us, sister?” exclaimed Elenor, brightening.

“I fear Col. Stacey will find his position no sinecure, my dear,” replied Miss Howard, with a smile, that made that gentleman decide that hers was the purest, as well as the most pleasant face he had seen for many a day.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN Hugh and Ada stood together beside that sublime creation of nature—Niagara Falls, in the minds of both, came thoughts of the exiled girl—intruding even amid the emotions that grand spectacle inspired, as in rapt silence, that was almost pain, they contemplated this mighty handiwork of God. Hugh, thinking involuntarily, how he had once hoped to watch Elenor's lovely, changeful face as she gazed for the first time on its awe-inspiring grandeur; and over Ada came the consciousness that he was at that moment thinking of a different tour, when Elenor was to have been his companion, and how, if she had not come between them, all might have been well—but she checked such unwelcome thoughts, and turning to her husband, said—

“O Hugh! language fails me to express what I feel—cannot you say something befitting the occasion?”

“As some one says—there are feelings that lie too deep for tears—so there are emotions too strong for words; and I think, my dear, we are both experiencing them now, and may comfort ourselves with the reflection, that it is not a lack of appreciation that keeps us silent, but only a too keen and unspeakable depth of emotion;” returned Hugh, but he did not say (can you blame him?) that a good deal of the “unspeakable emotion” that stirred the very depths of his heart, was regret for the dear, dark eyes, that at this very moment no doubt, were drenched in tears, for the loss of the blue ones, that were looking so regretfully on this far-famed

“Niagara! wonder of this western world,”
 this—‘beauteous queen
 Of cataracts!’”

After a long silence in which both were busy hanging on memory's wall the picture—“bearing in every faintest outline, in every lightest shade, the unmistakable *Deus fecit* of the great Master”—Hugh roused himself by an effort, and remarked—

“It is strange that these falls have never inspired a really grand poem in their praise—never, I think, have they been sung in verse, worthy of them.”

“No,” replied Ada, “if so, I have never seen them—though Maria Brooks has written a short poem, ‘To Niagara,’ also Mrs. Sigourney—hers I think quite good, but whether entirely worthy of the theme, I will not presume to judge—it begins,

‘Flow on forever, in thy glorious robe
 Of terror and of beauty. Yea, flow on,’ etc.

But you remember the lines, no doubt—that is, if you are one of the few men, that ever read anything from the pen of a woman;” said Ada, smiling demurely.

“Yes, I have read it—it is rather pretty—that is all; many pretty things have doubtless been said—many rythmical lines penned—but no grand poem, that shall resound, as do the thunders of its deep, solemn roar, forever—a sublime refrain, to the music of its eternal *Jubilate Deo!*”

To say that Hugh and Ada's wedding tour was entirely without pleasure, would not be true—they were young, and the young are never wholly miserable; and there was so much to interest and divert their minds, that there was little time, or opportunity for dwelling on forbidden topics, or indulging dangerous retrospect.

When they returned to Baltimore, their pleasant home awaited them ; thanks to the kindness of Mrs. Hamilton, everything had been arranged, carpets, matting, etc., put down, curtains up, (for Hugh had sent everything from New York) even pictures hung—save a few home pets, and family portraits, that Ada had not unpacked—so that she had only to make those additions, and such little changes as her own taste might suggest.

“My dear Mrs. Hamilton,” exclaimed Ada, in pleased surprise the next morning as they took possession, “how kind ! you have really left us nothing to do ; I shall hardly know what to do with myself.”

“Never fear, my dear, a housekeeper never need be idle—you will be busy enough getting up dainty dishes for your lord, for if he is like most men, the way to his heart, is through his stomach,” returned Mrs. Hamilton, laughing.

“I think Hugh is an exception, then, for he is nothing of an epicure” said Ada, turning to her husband with a smile.

“Wait, my dear, before you decide that point,” said Hugh, “I may be more exacting, now I have a wife to cater to my taste.”

“I only hope you will be, as that would be an incentive to exert myself in the culinary art—for which I have little talent or inclination,” replied Ada.

“My dear, do try your new piano,” said Hugh, as they seated themselves in their pretty, cosy parlor, when they had finished their tour of inspection.

“Oh yes ! is it not a beauty, Mrs. Hamilton ? It was dear papa’s gift on my wedding day—or rather the money to be thus appropriated—how I wish he were here to see and hear it,” and Ada seated herself at the instrument and prepared to comply with her husband’s request.

Notwithstanding so much had been done, Ada did not

find time hang heavy on her hands—she was soon busy enough receiving and returning calls, and her cordial reception into the most exclusive circles of the city, was quite flattering.

Mr. Randal offered Hugh a partnership in his business, which he gladly accepted; and the cultivated but lonely man, soon found his greatest pleasure in the pleasant evenings spent with Hugh and Ada, to whom he was ever a welcome visitor.

“As soon as Mrs. Stacey learned that her brother and his wife were fairly settled in their new house, she came on a visit to them and Mrs. Hamilton, bringing May with her—which was a pleasant surprise she had planned, to give Ada pleasure. May was charmed; and she and Stacey Hamilton were soon renewing the acquaintance begun at the Springs; and as May was now “sweet sixteen,” she was allowed greater liberty, and being exceedingly pretty and sprightly, soon created quite a sensation among the youth of Stacey’s age and circle.

“Miss May,” he said to her one day, “I am going to refuse to bring any more of those popinjays to see you; they besiege me all the time to come with, and introduce them, and then I have to ‘play second fiddle,’ which I don’t fancy at all.”

“Well, I should not care, Stacey, for I really prefer your society to any of them I have seen yet; so you need not feel jealous, neither need you feel very much flattered,” replied May with a saucy toss of her pretty head.

“May, I believe you are an arrant little flirt; you make yourself very agreeable to them, at any rate.”

“Would you have me sit like a stupid country rustic, and be laughed at by your city swells? If being agreeable and entertaining to my visitors, ‘be treason’ in your eyes—‘make the most of it,’” returned May laughing. “By

the way, Stacey, I think I shall set my cap for Mr. Randal—I have quite a fancy for being an old man's darling."

"I think he is decidedly taken now, May, if I am a judge; and you know he is rich—which no doubt will console you for his gray hairs, and disparity in age," replied Stacey.

"Certainly it will; I have a decided *penchant* for handsome surroundings—and perhaps he would take me to Europe; I believe I would marry my grandfather, if he would promise to do that," says May gayly.

"I know you are not in earnest, May; I have too high an opinion of you, to believe for a moment, that you would marry an old man for his money."

"You need not be too sure, Stacey—what has been done by many of my sex, may be done again; besides, I really and truly admire Mr. Randal, he is a much more sensible and entertaining companion, than any of the *boys* I have met," returned May teasingly.

"Not more so than many of those boys may be at his ripe age, perhaps," retorted Stacey, "but it is time for our drive May—get ready, and I will return in half an hour with my buggy."

Mrs. Stacey's remorse, when she learned that Elenor Fane was her husband's niece, can be imagined—though even then, the girl was not so dear to her as Ada. But Hugh—her darling—whose happiness was paramount to every other consideration—she feared might so regret the step he had taken, as to render him miserable. And while she felt safe from any out-spoken reproach for the influence she had exerted in bringing it about, yet she could not bear to think that in his heart Hugh would blame her, and she might take a lower, and less dear place in his regard than she had before held. But her fears were somewhat allayed, when she saw him apparently happy in his home,

and she tried not to think of Elenor's suffering when she learned that death alone could remove the barrier that now severed her and Hugh.

But if Mrs. Stacey thought her brother, or Ada entirely happy, it was because she could not look into their hearts, or penetrate the calm, conventional manner that prevented a betrayal of the regret and remorse that was tugging at the heartstrings of both, while the smiling countenance gave no sign of the unrest within their bosoms. For even her keen, anxious eyes could discover nothing in these early days of their marriage, on which to hang a fear for their ultimate happiness.

While she and Mrs. Hamilton had much to talk about the new-found niece of the family, little was said of her in the presence of Hugh or Ada, and neither of them voluntarily mentioned her name.

And so Mrs. Stacey's visit was at least a source of comfort to her, as well as of real enjoyment; for her brother and his gentle wife made every effort to render her stay with them agreeable, and almost forgot for the time their own secret troubles, in their earnest desire to please and entertain her—while Mrs. Hamilton was not behind them, in doing all she could devise for Lily's pleasure.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AFTER Col. Stacey's arrival Elenor (as we will still call her) was anxious to be again "on the wing"—said she could not realize the pleasure and comfort of having her uncle to look after them, until they were again in motion.

"And we had about exhausted Naples before you came, uncle Fred," she urged.

"Well, my dear, cannot you wait now until I exhaust it? We must see Herculaneum and Pompeii, Vesuvius, and many other places of interest that you have not yet visited; and I am glad that you have not, as I can be of real service to you on those excursions. So Naples must still be our headquarters for some time. I do not wish you to return home until you have seen all the great sights of this wonderful old world—am I not right, Miss Howard?"

"Perfectly; and I am more than glad that Nellie can have the benefit, not only of your protection, but of your wisdom and experience to select and point out the most important objects, and points of greatest interest—for we cannot see everything, if our purses and our time, were alike exhaustless."

"No, that is true, and since our little girl is impatient to be off, suppose we make a beginning to-morrow. I shall keep you going now, Miss Nellie, until you cry, 'hold, enough!' and whenever your enthusiasm flags, I shall unmercifully give the command to 'march!'"

"O uncle! I am no Wandering Jew to march even at your bidding," laughed Elenor. But it was very sweet to her, the thought that she had some one now, her very own flesh and blood, whose care and protection she could claim as her right, and to whom she was first and dearest. All her lonely orphanage was forgotten—even Hugh's marriage she could bear to think of, when she realized all she had gained—not that she had ceased to care for the loss of her lover, or felt that she could ever wholly forget the past; for she knew that she would never again attain such happiness as that sweet past had held for her.

But Elenor had little time to indulge sad thoughts—her uncle was so untiring in his devotion to her lightest wish, and so earnest in his efforts to render her happy, that she felt it would be but a poor return for his tenderness, to droop and sigh over the inevitable, and in her very lauda-

ble endeavor to seem cheerful, she daily grew more truly so, as well as happier.

It is needless to follow them in all their pleasant wanderings—amid the ruins of ancient cities—their delightful Cumean excursion—their sojourn in enchanting Florence, and marvellous Venice—where Elenor never tired of the gondolas, and the moonlight, and the exquisite music. Here in delicious, dreamy mood she would recline on the luxurious cushions of a gondola (leaving her uncle and Miss Howard to entertain each other)—as it glided down the grand canal, and listen to the silvery ripple of the waves against the prow, and the music of the vesper bells—“for nowhere is the sound of bells so sweet and deep and solemn as at Venice.”

Perhaps one thing too that lent an additional charm to Venice, was the presence of a young English artist, whom Col. Stacey encountered at the Academy of Fine Arts, where he was engaged in copying Titian's great masterpieces—The Presentation at the Temple, and The Assumption of the Virgin—and with whom he was so much pleased, that he invited him to call on Miss Howard and his niece at their hotel—of which invitation Mr. De Lancey gladly availed himself.

Col. Stacey was also so much pleased with his skill as an artist, that he begged him to undertake a portrait of his niece. Mr. De Lancey hesitated—though at first sight of Elenor, he had longed to transfer her face to canvas—for said he—

“I am but a tyro in my art as yet, Col. Stacey, especially in painting the ‘human face divine.’ I can do a little in the way of copying the old masters—but to copy direct from the hand of the Great Original, is another thing; however, if you really desire it, and Miss Stacey is willing to be bored with the sittings, I will make the attempt.”

“I do most earnestly desire it,” replied Col. Stacey,

“and shall feel that you are conferring a special favor, if you will undertake it.”

And could De Lancey's artist eye gaze day after day on the lovely face he was trying so faithfully to transfer in its perfectness to his canvas, and not find it traced more indelibly on his heart?

And Elenor? was there not danger to her, too, in these pleasant sittings to this handsome, talented artist? Especially as she fancied Mr. De Lancey resembled Hugh, and had ventured to say to her uncle one day, (it was her first voluntary allusion to Hugh)—

“Uncle Fred, does not Mr. De Lancey remind you of Mr. Legare?”

“It had not struck me before, Nellie, but since you mention it, I believe there is something about him like Hugh—his blonde hair and blue eyes, at least; but he is more effeminate, or I should rather say, more artist-like than our sturdy Hugh; and I am afraid he is growing fond of my little girl—eh, Nellie? don't flirt with him, child.”

“O uncle! you are certainly mistaken; he has never indicated such a thing by a word, during all my sittings,” laughed Elenor, but she did not say he had not indicated such a thing by *a look*; for if ever a man's eyes spoke volumes of something more than admiration, Mr. De Lancey's had; and small wonder, he must have been more, or less, than human, to watch the velvet, silken-fringed lids droop over the glorious dark eyes—the lovely flush come and go on the smooth olive cheek—the rosy lips uncloseth in a bewitching smile, revealing the pearly teeth—and not “learn the lesson of loving.”—And to make the danger more imminent, there were moonlight sails in a gondola, when De Lancey would take his guitar and sing to her soft, sweet Italian melodies, in their own musical tongue, until Elenor's very soul was steeped in delicious enchantment, and she almost imagined it was her lost Hugh beside her—

her very own still ! And when De Lancey would cease, and speak to her in tones eloquent of unuttered love—she would wake with a start from her dream, to the crushing reality, that Hugh was thousands of miles away, and the husband of Ada Singleton !

But the portrait was completed—save the finishing touches—and there was no longer any need for them to linger in—

“ Beautiful Venice, the bride of the sea.”

Col. Stacey and Miss Howard both expressed themselves delighted with Mr. De Lancey’s success, and Elenor said—

“ You have flattered me terribly, Mr. De Lancey, I know I am not as beautiful as that portrait,” and he whispered softly in reply—

“ A thousand times more lovely, Miss Stacey ; and I never felt myself so poor an artist, as in my vain attempt to paint you as you are—the loveliest of God’s creatures.”

“ Why, Mr. De Lancey ! you are certainly doing your best to make me vain—for I must have faith in the superior taste and judgment of an artist, remember—so beware how you offer incense to my vanity,” says Elenor lightly.

“ By the way, Miss Stacey, will you take a last sail with me this evening ?” asked Mr. De Lancey. “ The night will be lovely, as the moon is at her full ;” and Elenor could not refuse, though her woman’s intuition made her dread that “ last sail,” with the artist.

“ Mr. De Lancey,” said Col. Stacey, coming up at the moment, “ as soon as you have put your last touches to the portrait, ship to me at Liverpool, care of my agent there, here is the address—” taking a card from his pocket—“ and if you will call at my hotel to-night, I will add the balance I owe you, to my warmest thanks, for the finely executed likeness of my niece.”

“ Thank you, Col. Stacey, but I had much rather you

would cancel the debt, by giving me permission to win the fair original of the portrait—may I try?" said Mr. De Lancey, blushing like a girl.

This little aside, had not been heard by Elenor, she having joined Miss Howard, who was at the other end of the long studio, examining some unfinished sketches. "Certainly, my dear sir, you have my hearty consent to win her, if you can—but the portrait is mine, and I shall pay for that, and give you my niece into the bargain, if it be her wish," replied Col. Stacey.

"If you will, I must submit, and I confess, I am too poor as yet, to despise compensation for my labor—being a younger son, I have my own way to make in the world, but think I could support your niece in comfort, if she would honor me with her hand. My uncle—Sir Godwin De Lancey, has promised to compensate me handsomely for the copies I am now engaged on. He greatly admired those masterpieces of Titian, and begged me to undertake copies for his private gallery. I felt it almost presumption in me to make the effort—but his very liberal offer, was quite a spur to my hesitating compliance."

"Certainly, I admire your energy and determination," returned Col. Stacey, "and you are doing splendidly, if I am any judge, and bid fair to rival Titian. Your success as an artist is assured, my dear sir—you have great cause to feel encouraged."

"Thank you very much, Col. Stacey—for I perceive you are a connoisseur in art, and your words of commendation, give me great pleasure. I have an engagement to take your niece out for a row to-night, and will come early to your hotel, when we can arrange about the portrait—now, we will join the ladies. I promised to show Miss Howard a copy in miniature, that I attempted when in Florence, of the Flora of Titian—I would like you to give me your opinion of it also."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

STACEY HALL was closed ; and right desolate it looked to Winnie, even though clothed in all its summer beauty, when she wandered there, as she frequently did, in her afternoon strolls, and missed so terribly the kind word and genial smile of its absent master.

Maunder Cinthy would occasionally open the windows, and give the house an airing ; and as she walked through the deserted rooms, to see that all was right, would mutter to herself—" Well, well, Mass Fred gone cross the big water after Mass Jack's chile—'peared to me all de time Miss El'n'r look like ole mistis. I hope de good Lord will let um cum back safe to de ole place ; dis chile will be proud when she see Mass Jack's darter walken round dese rooms whar her pa played when he wus a little picaninny—git out here ; you chillun think cause de white folks gone, you got ter cum in de big hus—git out, I tell you !"

" Mammy Cinthy please let us see de picturs."

" Shan't do it — git out dis minnit, I'm guine ter shet de door now — jes march inter dat backyard quicker." And the old woman locked the door and put the key in her pocket, marching the crowd of little black imps in front of her, she closed and securely fastened the gate leading into the grounds that were her pride and delight, as she knew they were the pride and delight of their master. But many a long and weary month it seemed to the faithful old soul, before the master returned to the home, now so lonely and deserted.

Major Stacey could endure his few weeks of solitude, because he knew it was only for a few weeks at most. But

he went often to see, and comfort his old friend, Dr. Singleton, and the almost daily bulletin from Lily, served to make the time seem shorter. But at Roselawn the change was felt most keenly; the old doctor missed Ada sadly; for since her mother's death the girl had been companion and friend, as well as daughter—and while May was very dear to her father, Ada was the very apple of his eye—in her he saw the living image of his lost wife, and now the delight of his eyes was taken from him, and the fond father drooped, for the world had grown lonelier.

And to Robert Brent, everything wore a gloomy aspect after Ada left, but now that she was married, he felt that he must, and would, cure himself of his hopeless passion, and very soon something occurred to aid him in his effort.

Winnie Williams, who had been delicate and drooping all the spring, was taken really ill, soon after Mrs. Stacey and May left for Baltimore. Dr. Singleton came several times to see her, but Robert was her constant attendant. Winnie had been delicate from her birth, and her mother was seriously alarmed for the effect of a long illness on her fragile constitution, and begged Robert to see her as often as he could, for she knew the old doctor was not equal to the exertion of frequent and continued visits.

At first, Winnie was not very ill—the attack seemed to be a slow fever, of a typhoid character, and there was really little to do; but Dr. Brent would sit for a long time on his visits, trying to cheer and amuse her. He frequently brought her flowers, tastefully arranged by aunt Mary, and little delicacies from the same kind hand, to tempt her failing appetite.

Winnie grew to look for his daily visits with longing, for he would talk to her so cheerfully, and so amusingly, that often a silvery laugh would ripple from the pale, wan lips of the sick girl. And she was so patient and sweet—so grateful for attention and sympathy, and withal so

womanly and sensible, that Robert found himself studying with interest the girl's character, who before, he had only noticed, as he had other girls of her age, whom he knew by sight, in the neighborhood.

But with all his and Dr. Singleton's combined skill Winnie grew gradually worse. Aunt Mary went as often as she could to assist Mrs. Williams in nursing her—for she missed sadly her absent friends from Aspendale and Roselawn, especially Elenor, whom she often thought of and longed for ; and even took comfort in the assurance of the latter's tender sympathy, if she had known of the illness of her little favorite.

And she found in her time of trouble, that even Miss Jemima was not devoid of some redeeming traits—for her narrow soul expanded, and she came and offered to do what she could to relieve Mrs. Williams of the care of her sick darling. And although there was a little spiteful gossip thrown in now and then, as they watched around the sick-bed, Miss Jemima proved herself a skilful and devoted nurse.

The days dragged their slow length along, and June roses drooped beneath July's withering breath, and still Winnie lay prostrated by the slow, scorching fever that seemed consuming her young life. Mrs. Williams was herself exhausted with long watching and anxiety—aunt Mary came and went like the good angel of mercy she was—and Robert was untiring, while his skill was taxed to the utmost. He was very anxious and apprehensive as to the issue, for the young girl had taken a deep hold on his sympathy and interest.

To-night he knew would be the crisis of the disease, and that from the unconscious stupor, which for days had held her in its lethargic grasp, she would wake to life again, or pass into the deeper oblivion of death. When he left her, late in the afternoon, he said to the poor, weary mother—

“I will return after tea and bring aunt Mary to watch with me—you must rest—to-night will be the turning-point, and I must be with her.”

“O, Dr. Brent! do you think she will die?” asked the almost despairing woman, for the hundredth time perhaps, during her child’s illness, “I cannot give my darling up!”

“My dear madam, while there is life there is hope—but I will not deceive you—try to be prepared for the worst,” replied Robert.

“O doctor! save her! save my darling, and I will forever bless you!”

“I will do all in my power, rest assured—for your child has become very dear to me, Mrs. Williams—will you give her to me, if she lives?”

“O Robert! how can you think of such a thing now, and she so ill?—but how can I give her up to Death!—Yes, if you can snatch her from his icy grasp, she is yours, if you can win her—only save her—I ask no more!”

“Thank you, dear madam! I will fight the grim bridegroom inch by inch, and pluck her from his arms to the warm, loving clasp of mine—by God’s help!” said Robert solemnly, then hurried out to his buggy, and drove Selim at such a pace, that he must have thought his master had gone mad, or was pursued by the furies; but he did not slacken his speed, for one thing he did know with certainty—that his oats awaited him in his snug stable, as a compensation for his hard drive.

“Dear Mrs. Williams, do go and rest,” urged aunt Mary, as the weary night was creeping by, and still the devoted mother could not bear to leave her child. “If you cannot sleep, you can pray, that is all you can do, if you remain, and you look utterly worn out—do go—we will call you if there is the least change—try to sleep, and leave your darling in the hands of God—He will do what is best.”

“O, Aunt Mary! will my precious child never speak to me again? Shall I never more hear the sound of her sweet voice, that is music to my ear? how can I give her up! pray for me, dear friend, you are so good—God will hearken to your prayers!” pleaded the stricken mother.

“I will—I have, during her whole illness, prayed unceasingly, that God would spare your dear one, if it is His will—cannot you, too, leave her in His hands, and say from your heart—‘Thy will be done?’”

“Yes, oh yes, I have tried—but it would be very bitter to lose her in her sweet girlhood—no more to have her comforting love, her bright, cheering presence in our life, that would be so dark without her—surely God will be merciful, and spare my greatest treasure!”

“Leave us, dear wife,” said Mr. Williams, coming to her side, “you will be ill yourself—I cannot lose wife and daughter too. As Miss Thornton truly says, you can do nothing more, but pray;” and she suffered her husband to lead her to her own room, where she sank faint and exhausted on the bed.

And while they watched, and waited, and prayed for the precious young life, through the long, weary hours of that night, Mrs. Stacey, May, and the children were nearing their home as fast as the “night express” could bring them. Major Stacey had at the last (he forebore to mention it earlier, for fear of marring the pleasure of her visit) written his wife of Winnie’s extreme illness, and as her time had nearly expired, she hastened her departure, hoping to be of service to her friend, yet fearing she might be too late.

But when the next day Major Stacey met them at the station, to her first eager question—“How is Winnie?” he was able to answer—“Better, she will live.” Yes, she will live! Not yet had the irrevocable fiat gone forth in regard to Winnie—her mission on earth was not accom-

plished—she has been spared still to brighten her humble home, still to comfort her fond parents, and it may be, in the future, to become a blessing and a recompense to the man, who has been the instrument in the hands of God, of her recovery.

May came often to see Winnie, and the friendship—but partial before—became true and permanent, now that she had a better opportunity of appreciating the sick girl's truly lovely and refined character—which had been little known, except to Elenor and Col. Stacey. Perhaps Robert unconsciously hastened the intimacy, for he frequently took May with him on his visits to Winnie, even after her rapid convalescence made them no longer necessary—and she could not fail to notice the more than ordinary interest he took in his patient—which may also have increased hers. Mrs. Williams—to whom the expense was a weighty consideration—had several times hinted that she thought Winnie no longer needed his services, and Robert would answer that he must take care of *his own*. “You forget your promise surely, dear Mrs. Williams—but I have not forgotten, and I give you warning, that I shall try to gain her affections—but I must do it unknown to her—do not let her suspect our compact. Is she not lovely now, and have I not earned the right to win and wear her—if I can?”

“You have, my dear boy, and also my best wishes for your success,” replied Mrs. Williams heartily. And it did indeed seem as if Robert had earned the right to claim the girl, whom he had certainly been the instrument, under God, of saving—and her recovery was so rapid and perfect, that as the days went by, she bloomed into new beauty, and more vigorous health, until she bore little resemblance to the fragile, delicate Winnie of other days. It was strange—almost startling, the great change wrought by her illness, and Dr. Singleton shook his head, as he said to her—

“My dear, I fear this is not good flesh and healthy blood, you are getting so rapidly—let me pinch you and see,” and he playfully pinched Winnie’s fast rounding cheeks, and plump, dimpled arms, which were firm and solid under the cruel test, she laughingly tried to evade.

The girls were now often together, and to Winnie it was especially pleasant to have the companionship of one so near her own age—a want she had felt very much since their removal to their present home. And it was not difficult to love May Singleton, who—although she had not the depth and strength of character that Winnie possessed—was bright and affectionate, and very winning, when she cared to please. May had much to tell of her visit to Baltimore, and the name of Stacey Hamilton occurred so often, in connection with all she did and saw, that Winnie drew her own conclusions, and would tease May, until she declared she would tell her nothing more.

“O May,” said Winnie one day that she was spending at Roselawn, “are you not glad dear Miss Elenor is coming back to us, and is Col. Stacey’s niece? Now she will live with him at the Hall, and be near us always. I am so thankful I did not die before seeing her again, for I love her more than anyone in the world except my parents and brothers.”

“Yes, I am very glad about Miss Elenor, but Winnie I think you might keep a little of your affection for poor cousin Robert, for I believe he cares more for *you* than any one else, now that sister Ada is married,” replied May, rather rejoicing in this opportunity to pay Winnie back for her teasing.

“O May! you ought not to say that—Dr. Brent only likes me as a patient, whom he has almost raised from the dead, and still feels an interest in. If he thought his kindness and attention had awakened such a suspicion, he would be very much hurt; and you know he loved your

sister too deeply to forget her so easily—for a mere child, like me—please dear, don't hint such a thing again," said Winnie earnestly. For though the girl was conscious that a sight of Robert always quickened the pulsations of her innocent heart, yet she had never asked herself what this meant—or taken his tenderness and devotion for aught but the interest of a kind-hearted physician in his patient.

"Well, I will not, Winnie, if it distresses you, so I generously forbear to retaliate," laughed May, "but do not expect me to be blind, as well as dumb. As for cousin Robert's love for sister—he has always known that was hopeless, and now she is married, I think he only loves her 'cousinly'—no more. Come, dear, and play me that last piece you took from Miss Elenor—'Cloches de Monastere'—I think it so pretty."

"It always makes me sad to play that," said Winnie, going towards the piano, "or did, when I thought I should never see Miss Elenor again—but now I shall not feel so, I suppose. No doubt she has many times ere this, heard the real monastery bells, borne on the soft southern air—sweeter far than any poor imitation of them can ever be."

CHAPTER XXIX.

COL. STACEY had some arrangements to make in regard to their departure that could not be deferred, and Miss Howard some packing, so it was decided that Mr. De Lancey and Elenor should not keep their gondolier waiting, but go at once, and later the others would join them.

"For we must have a last sail, too, Miss Howard," said Col. Stacey, "before bidding farewell to Venice. If we are not so young as Nellie and Mr. De Lancey, we have not

ceased to care for moonlight and music (to say nothing of 'love and flowers') especially on the water in a gondola."

"No, indeed, and I shall be glad of one more opportunity of fixing the enchanting vision in my memory," replied Miss Howard. "Here, Nellie, throw this light shawl on, it will be damp and chilly out on the lagunes—and don't go too far before we join you; take good care of her, Mr. De Lancey."

"I hardly need that caution, dear Miss Howard—you may safely trust me for that," returned the artist, as he led Elenor down to the gondola—which was the most luxurious he could find in Venice.

Soon they were gliding away down the canal, past darkened and deserted old palaces—hastening to see the full moon rise over the lagunes. Slowly the queen of night, in her mature, perfected loveliness, rose from her watery couch, glowing with splendor, as she drew aside the curtain of darkness, and scattered her silver radiance over the waters, in beauty weird and unearthly! Elenor bade the gondolier stop rowing, and in silence deep and thrilling, they gazed on the lovely scene—"more wild and unreal, and marvelously beautiful than any dream; while music from other gondolas floating around them, added the last perfection to the enchantments of the night!"

"O Mr. De Lancey, is it not heavenly!" exclaimed Elenor, when she could no longer keep silent, "how apropos those charming lines of Miss Mulock—

'Stars tremble o'er us, and moonlight before us,
Mountains in shadow and forests asleep;
Down the dim river we float on forever—
Speak not, ah! breathe not—there's peace on the deep.'

As the waves cover the depths we glide over,
So let the past in forgetfulness sleep;
While down the river we float on forever—
Speak not, ah! breathe not—there's peace on the deep.'

Ah ! I could indeed ‘float on forever !’” she said, as their gondola again glided lightly over the waters ; but to her own heart she added—“if the *past*, would only ‘in forgetfulness sleep.’”

“My dear Miss Stacey, I echo the feeling most heartily, if it could be ‘forever’ by *your* side ;” says De Lancey, forgetting Miss Howard’s admonition, ‘not to go too far’—forgetful of all else, save the girl by his side, and that he loved her—and could not let her go without making an effort to win her ! They floated on, farther away from the “silent city”—and the two who would soon be searching for them.

Elenor did not reply—she was absorbed in the beauty around her, and did not heed, in fact, scarcely heard Mr. De Lancey’s remark ; and he continued—“Miss Stacey, I have your uncle’s permission to ask your hand—will you not add to the happiness of this night, and crown its memory, by the gift I covet ?” he said, as he, unloosed the slender, shapely hands she had clasped together, while she repeated with thrilling emphasis the beautiful lines—and held one in a close, strong pressure.

“Speak, dear Elenor ! say that you will be my wife—that thus, side by side, we may ‘float on forever !’”

Elenor was roused at last—she could no longer be silent—

“O, Mr. De Lancey, I cannot ! it is too bad ! I am always making somebody unhappy—I am the most unfortunate person in the world !”

“Why unfortunate ? You need not make me unhappy—I hope you will not—for you have it in your power to make me the happiest man alive, by one little word—will you not speak it ? such a little one—say it, dearest ?”

“Oh, I cannot say it—I have no love to give, and you would not have a wife without love—that is all over for me. I sincerely wish I could return your affection, Mr. De

Lancey—I know you are noble and good, and I feel honored by your preference—but I cannot. Please forgive me, I am very sorry—I wish I could have warned you not to love me,” she said *naively*—for Elenor was no coquette. Poor child! love to her, was certainly “ever a sorrow proving.”

She had not cared so much for Mr. Kennon’s disappointment—for she had less faith in the depth and sincerity of his love, but this man—she felt—she knew, that with his whole artist-soul, he loved her—why could she not return it? Hugh was lost to her forever—it was a sin to love him now—yet why did she cling to that old, sweet love-dream? Rupert De Lancey was a man that any woman might love, and feel ennobled in loving; and he was very much like Hugh—all this she would admit—but oh! *he was not Hugh!*

Mr. De Lancey was silent—what could he say? It was such a disappointment—he had hoped so much to win her, and now it was all over—why should he urge his suit? but at last he ventured to say—

“Miss Elenor, must I accept your answer as final? If the love of which you speak is over—is it not dead?”

“No, oh no, I fear it is not dead—not yet—she said hastily, “but there is uncle and Sister Florine, at last,” she added joyfully, as a gondola glided alongside, and Col. Stacey called out—

“We have had hard work to find you, with so many of the funereal looking things floating around us, and I expect I have hailed and interrupted a dozen pair of lovers in their soft billings and cooings. Have you had moonlight enough to-night, Nellie? If so, it is time our prows were turned homeward.”

“I should never get enough, uncle Fred, but I am ready to return when you wish,” replied Elenor, quite relieved to have her rather painful *tête-à-tête* with the artist ended.

“Mr. De Lancey,” said Col. Stacey as they rowed side by side, “I wonder these lagunes do not make this lovely city of the sea unhealthy.”

“And so they would I am told if it were not for the constant agitation of the tides of the Adriatic.”

“It is a wonderful provision of nature;” replied Col. Stacey, “we are led continually to exclaim—‘How wonderful are thy works, O Lord! in wisdom hast thou made them all!’ Even as an undevout astronomer is mad, so must anyone be, who can view the wonders of this old world and say—‘there is no God.’”

“Yes, indeed,” replied Miss Howard, “never have I bowed in such adoring wonder and worship, and echoed the words of another—‘Oh, God must have brooded longer over this land, than over any other on the broad face of the world!’”

On the steps of their hotel, Mr. De Lancey took his leave of the girl, who had crossed his path thus strangely for a few short weeks, to mock him with a loveliness and sweetness, that could never be his—but whose image was graven on his heart for all time, and the memory of whom would linger with him when all else was fading into nothingness!

CHAPTER XXX.

OUR travellers heard rarely from the dear ones at home; for after their departure from Venice, they did not remain long in one place. And when Winnie was languishing through the hot July days, Elenor was wandering, (all unconscious of the illness of her favorite) contented and almost happy, through smiling picturesque valleys, and haunting cool, cosy mountain nooks, in the Tyrol.

After a few weeks given to Paris, and a somewhat longer sojourn in England, they gladly turned their faces homeward, and early in October arrived safely in America—where anxious and longing hearts awaited their coming. They hastened to Baltimore as soon as possible, and at last, with loving pride, Col. Stacey presented his niece to her aunt—Mrs. Hamilton, who warmly welcomed her—as did the other members of the family.

Stacey already knew and admired her, and “cousin Elenor” soon won Maud’s heart, between whom and herself there was a striking resemblance, not at all strange, since their near relationship was known. Maud Hamilton was now fifteen, and quite well grown, and lady-like for her age. Miss Howard also was a welcome and honored guest in her cousin’s house, and intended to make it her home for the present, at the earnest solicitation of both Mr. Hamilton and his wife.

The only damper to Elenor’s pleasure was the thought that she must meet Hugh and Ada, and how she should bear this trying ordeal with calmness, she did not know; and would fain have avoided it altogether, had it been possible.

Mrs. Hamilton was relieved, at first sight of Elenor, from all fear lest the offspring of poor Jack’s *mésalliance* should prove a source of mortification to her aristocratic name and position; and was also a little piqued at the quiet dignity with which this regal girl bore the honor of so near a connection with herself—as well as at the attention and devotion that the refined and wealthy Eveline Howard, and her dignified, elegant brother Fred, lavished on her—but which she was fain to confess, Elenor repaid with loving tenderness and respect.

Not that Mrs. Hamilton was disposed to depreciate her new-found niece, but there was just the slightest feeling of disappointment, that even her reflected glory could add

nothing to Elenor's prestige or position—but on the contrary, her niece would be a new and brilliant star, whose radiance would add lustre to *her* drawing-rooms.

Of course Hugh and Ada came the next day, in their handsome pony phaeton—as they lived some distance from Mrs. Hamilton's—to see the long absent ones. That it was indeed a trying moment—that first meeting after such changes—we can well imagine. Poor Ada! on her it was hardest of all. When she saw Elenor in all her marvellous beauty—even more perfect than when she had seen her last—as though the soft sunlight of Italy had given to the dark eyes a new lustre, and to her cheek a richer tint—while on the perfect lips lingered the deep glow of its own red roses; and added to all her graceful manners, perfected by foreign travel and society—when Ada noted this, she felt more keenly the doubt, that had long been growing into certainty—that Hugh would never love her, as he had loved this glorious creature.

But to the casual observer, they met calmly and cordially—while in reality, each heart was throbbing with a passionate pain, that could not be stifled.

Mrs. Hamilton insisted on introducing her niece to her friends by a splendid entertainment—for she knew the sensation Elenor would create—but Col. Stacey objected—saying he had been absent so long, he must hasten home.

“Well,” replied his sister, “you can go, Fred, if you must, and leave Elenor with me, which I think you ought to do anyway—she is as much my neice as yours, and I have as good right to her.”

“I will not agree to that, Ellen—have I not the best right to you, my dear?” turning to Elenor who had been listening with eager interest to the question of going or staying—party, or departing—for she was really anxious to be again at a safe distance from Hugh—anxious to put miles between herself and the man she was tempted still to

think of, more than was consistent with her ideas of right, or conducive to her peace—knowing him so near, and seeing him, (as she would doubtless do) frequently. Elenor laid her hand caressingly on her uncle's, as she answered—

“He is my guardian, aunt Ellen, and I must be guided by him ; my dead father left me to his care, and I ought to obey him as I would that father, if he were living.”

“Of course, child, but my brother and your uncle, must be reasonable. You will be as good as buried as far as society is concerned at the Hall, and you ought to—and shall—see something of it while you are here—so the matter is settled, and I shall send out my invitations at once.”

Mrs. Hamilton conquered—as a woman usually does, when she determines to do so—and she decided in her own mind, that it should be the most *recherché* affair of the opening season.

That evening, after Hugh and Ada's visit, Col. Stacey found Elenor alone in the twilight on the veranda, and in tears. “My dear child, what is it?—why these tears?” he asked, lifting her face to his, to assure himself that he was not mistaken.

“O uncle ! let us leave here, and go at once to the Hall—I cannot bear it—I thought I was stronger ;” and she leaned her head on her uncle's shoulder, as he put an arm tenderly around her, in his loving way, while he said, almost sternly, for him—

“Child, this will never do ! you must try to bear seeing Hugh the husband of another, or how can you ever be happy in the love of any other man ?”

“I do not want the love of any other man ! exclaimed Elenor passionately—then pleadingly—“Oh, take me away from here, dear uncle—I thought I was growing reconciled—but a sight of Hugh, has shown me how weak and rebellious I am still.”

“My poor child !” returned Col. Stacey, more gently,

“we must remain now until after your aunt’s party, that she is giving for your benefit—it would not do to disappoint her.”

“No—I suppose not,” says Elenor reluctantly, “but I wish it was over, and we were together at the Hall—away from all temptation.”

“Oh, you will enjoy it, my dear, for you will be the cynosure of all eyes, and your sex all like that, eh, little girl?” returned her uncle lightly, in his efforts to draw her thoughts from the one torturing subject he had hoped was buried and forgotten.

* * * * *

Col. Stacey and Miss Howard both, had made valuable additions to Elenor’s wardrobe in Paris, so that she had, among many others, several of Worth’s most exquisite conceptions, in the way of evening dresses—one that her aunt Ellen selected as best suited to her style, was of rich garnet-colored silk, trimmed with point-lace. The low bodice and short sleeves showed to perfection the beautiful neck and arms—the slender throat was encircled by a necklace of garnet, and in the delicate ears, long pendants quivered and glowed with their imprisoned, blood-red light, while in her hair, gleamed a crimson Japonica—the only bit of color to relieve its jet-black waves. And when Elenor stood with Mrs. Hamilton under the blazing chandelier, and was introduced to her friends, she looked indeed like some young duchess, in her dark, regal beauty.

Hugh was strangely silent and absorbed during the evening; and though he tried to turn away his eyes, and thoughts, from the lovely vision, the old magnetic power that Elenor had, always exercised over him, drew them back to herself, until at last, he yielded to the spell, and gave himself up to the pleasure of watching this rare enchantress, whom he had lost by his own mad act.

Col. Stacy, with the delicacy and tact peculiar to him,

devoted himself to Ada, and succeeded in a measure, in drawing her attention from her husband's preoccupied manner—so unusual, and unlike his gay, sociable habit in society.

And Ada, too, was looking her best, and prettiest—for she had bestowed great care on her toilet, in her very natural desire, not to be entirely eclipsed by the siren who had bewitched Hugh ; and she was in that interesting condition, that lends new beauty to some women. There was a softer light in the violet eyes—a rosier fulness on the delicate cheek—a sweeter smile around the tender, mobile mouth—a more *spirituelle* expression on the whole face—almost such a look in fact, as you could fancy the Holy Virgin wore, when the Immaculate Conception slept beneath her heart, and anticipations of the Divine maternity filled her soul !

Elenor was so surrounded all the evening, that Hugh had little opportunity for saying what he had longed to say, since he had known that he would see her, and had asked himself a thousand times—“ what *must* she think of me ? ” and now his heart failed him, as he thought—“ what *could* I say ? How exonerate myself from blame in her eyes ? No ; it is best so—explanations are dangerous—but I must not, *will not*, see her again, it is more than I can bear ! ” Poor Hugh ! he strove very hard to banish *regret*, and be *true* to the innocent girl he had wronged, by marrying—for can any circumstance make it right or safe, for a man to marry one woman, when his whole heart is filled with love for another ? But surely, if ever a man might be held blameless for being inveigled into such an act Hugh was that man.

Mrs. Hamilton was more than satisfied with the sensation Elenor created among her friends, and was almost wearied with the oft-repeated remark—“ How very lovely your niece is, dear Mrs. Hamilton—where have you been

hiding this 'rare and radiant maiden' that we see her now for the first time?"

And with pardonable pride she would explain—"My niece has just returned from abroad, where she has been travelling, since her education was completed."

* * * * *

A few days after the party, Col. Stacey and Elenor left for Georgia—but the former carried with him a promise from Miss Howard that their separation should be short. For—as the reader has doubtless suspected—Col. Stacey had learned to love the gentle, refined woman very truly, during their pleasant travels abroad—not with the first, passionate love of youth, perhaps, nor thus did she regard him—but they each entertained for the other, a chastened, pure, and abiding affection, that they knew would brighten the noonday of their lives, and gild its declining years.

CHAPTER XXXI.

NOT until they were alone on their homeward journey, did Col. Stacey communicate to Elenor the welcome news—that she had for some time half suspected, and devoutly hoped might be true.

"Oh! I am so glad, dear uncle!" she exclaimed, "if I could have selected from all the world, my precious sister is the woman I would have chosen for you. Nothing could add so much to my happiness as this—you surely divined it was my dearest wish, for I have long felt that you were made for each other."

"I am rejoiced that you are pleased, my dear, though I believed you would be;" replied Col. Stacey.

"Yes, indeed; I cannot tell you how delighted I am—

but when will you bring her to the Hall, uncle ? Do let it be soon, for I shall miss her so terribly !" urged Elenor.

"Just as soon as she will let me, you may be sure. She almost promised that I might return for her early in December—but the happy day is not yet fixed. I must have the old place brightened up a little for my fastidious bride, so you will find work enough for your head and hands in helping me, my dear. I ordered new furniture before I left Baltimore, for some of the rooms — it will be there before us I expect."

"It will be a labor of love," returned Elenor, "to do anything I can to render more attractive the future home of one who has done so much to brighten my life as that dear, good woman, and I am so glad that I have been the means of bringing you two together, who are so dear to me, and who I know will add so much to each other's happiness—Oh, will we not be a happy *trio*?" and tears of joy and gratitude dimmed for a moment, the dark eyes. "I shall be impatient, dear uncle, for the time to come, when our dear one can be with us, never more to be separated in this life !"

"Until you leave us, dear, to brighten and bless the home of some good man," replied her uncle—"do you think I shall be permitted to keep such a *rara avis* in the home-nest long ? I fear not. Nor could I wish it—whatever is for my darling's happiness, I shall try to bear for her sake."

"I shall never marry, dear uncle—if I could ever have loved again, I should have loved Mr. De Lancey ; but it was not to be—and I cannot force my heart," replied Elenor quietly, but firmly.

"Not yet, perhaps, dear, but time is a great healer ; and I shall never feel entirely reconciled to myself, until you are happy in the love of another," said her uncle.

"But I am not unhappy, uncle—do not think that"—

and then Elenor was silent, thinking she had not been quite truthful, in her great desire to save her uncle from any self-reproach, which he was prone to indulge—too morbidly—in regard to his share in her troubles.

Presently Col. Stacey said—“ You know we go to Aspendale first, my dear.”

“ O uncle ! there—where I have been at once so happy and so miserable ! I doubt if the whole world held so wretched a being as I, when I went forth from its gates—branded with a worse than the mark of Cain !” and Elenor shuddered even now as she recalled those dark days.

“ That is all past, my child—do not live it over again ; think how differently you return—the loved and honored daughter of a proud name, welcomed by all—for your Aunt Lilian and Uncle Walter are longing to greet you, and they would feel hurt if we did not go to them at once. Besides, she fears you may not feel cordial towards her, for the part she took in Hugh’s unfortunate marriage—though she believed it would promote his happiness, by helping him to forget—you cannot blame her ?”

“ No ; I do not blame her, under the circumstances ; and I could bear it all, if I thought her aim had been accomplished—but I fear, Hugh is not happy.”

“ He cannot be entirely miserable with such a wife as Ada ; my greatest fear is that she will be the keenest sufferer, or I have greatly mistaken the sensitive, noble woman I believe her to be,” replied Col. Stacey.

“ Yes, she is a good woman, and I sincerely hope she may be a happy one. I wish, for her sake, as well as my own, that Hugh and I had never looked into each other’s faces again—it would have been better for all parties,” returned Elenor with visible emotion.

“ My dear, do not talk so—you make me feel that I don’t deserve to be so happy in my own love, when I have caused you to suffer so keenly.”

“But you must not feel so, dear uncle ; as I have said, I am not wholly unhappy, and was only regretting the meeting which had awakened memories that were dormant, if not dead. But I *will not*, if I can help it,” she said, trying to smile brightly, “ever again

‘Look mournfully into the past,
But go forth to meet the shadow future
Without fear, and with a brave heart.’ ”

“Thank you, my darling ! it makes me happy to hear you say this,” replied her uncle.

“Let us never speak of it again, uncle Fred.” And they never did. Years after they both remembered this hour—when the past, though a sad, was no longer a painful memory.

* * * * *

Major Stacey met them at the station, and as he folded Elenor to his heart, and saw the striking family likeness, he wondered afresh how they could have been so blind. “My dear child, can you ever forgive such idiots as we were,” he said, “and acknowledge us as kin ? Welcome dear niece, thrice welcome to our hearts, and to the home of your father ! We are all prepared to love you very dearly, and to try and atone for the past.” And he held her from him and gazed fondly into her lovely, tear-dimmed eyes, and flower-like face.

“I have nothing to forgive, dear uncle Walter — you were always kind and good, before you knew I was your naughty niece, and it is I who should ask your forgiveness for entering your family as a teacher, with *part* of a name,” said Elenor smiling.

“I think you have been sufficiently punished, my poor child—but the carriage is waiting, and your aunt and cousins are impatient to see you. Fred, I am glad to see you looking so well, old fellow—foreign travel agrees with

you. But why did you not bring that sweet sister along too? I did not know but she might bewitch you, as she has Elenor."

"Perhaps she has—have patience, and I may introduce her to you before long, as mistress of the Hall," returned Col. Stacey laughingly, as he hurried away to look after their baggage; while Major Stacey led Elenor to the carriage—not dreaming for a moment, that there was any truth in his brother's gay badinage.

The drive was pleasant and cheerful, for the brothers had much to say to each other after their long separation, and there was little need for Elenor to talk, which she felt a great relief—being busy with her own thoughts, and living over again the months which had left their impress on her young life—never to be effaced.

Her heart beat fast, and the tears would come, as the carriage entered the familiar avenue at Aspendale, while a thousand memories came thronging on her brain—the pleasant walks she and Hugh had enjoyed under its grateful shade—his first confession of love in the moonlight of that never-to-be-forgotten Christmas night, that now seemed so long ago, and the miserable ending, to their short, happy dream. Ah, very soon had Elenor broken her promise not to "look mournfully into the past."

Col. Stacey noticed her emotion, and knew by what memories she was stirred—he pressed her hand and whispered—"Be brave, my darling, and remember your resolution—there are the children running to meet you, let them see the cheerful, smiling face of their whilom governess, as they remember it," and smiles chased away the tears, as the carriage stopped, and Maud and Wattie clambered up to kiss and welcome "cousin Elenor."

And Mrs. Stacey hardly waited for her to get out, before her arms were round her in a loving clasp, and she too was pouring out words of penitence and regret, for all the

dear girl had suffered, as coherently as she could for her sobs. Her husband seeing her agitation and how entirely she was overcome, drew her gently away, whispering—

“Lilian, dear, Elenor is very tired, do not excite her by any allusion to the past—let us only rejoice that we have her with us at last, and help her to forget.” Then eager black hands were outstretched, and Maumer Betty’s and Patty’s faces were radiant with welcome for their dear Miss Elenor, now their “very own young misses,” as Patty exultantly said to the other servants when the good news had been told her.

It was still some hours before night when they reached Aspendale, and after Mrs. Stacey had taken Elenor to her own old room to rest. Col. Stacey said he would go over and see Williams, and let them know at the Hall that he had come. “I will return to tea, tell Lily, and remain until bedtime, but I must sleep at home to-night, Walter, it seems such an age since I left.”

“Well, take my horse, Fred—I will have him round in a moment,” said his brother.

“No, thank you, Walter, I’d much rather walk—I need the exercise, after being cooped up for so long.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

THAT night, after Maud and Wattie had been sent reluctant to bed (for the children were very loth to leave their new-found cousin, and long-absent uncle), Col. Stacey told his brother and Lily of his anticipated marriage. And though Miss Howard was a stranger to them personally, yet from all they had heard of her, they were prepared to congratulate him on his choice, and were truly glad that at

last, there would be a wife and mistress to preside over his lonely home.

The next day the Singletons, Mrs. Williams and Winnie, came over to welcome the wanderers. Elenor was charmed at the change in her little pupil—for as we know, time (and her illness) had so enhanced Winnie's beauty, and added to her attractions, that Elenor could but observe it with pleasure, and the warmest admiration; and the girl's unqualified delight at again seeing her dear teacher, was very grateful to Elenor's loving heart. She almost forgot during the day the long months of travel, and sight-seeing—as also the dark days of the past—and imagined herself still Mrs. Stacey's happy governess, and all the rest a dream from which she had at last awakened.

May kept Winnie's cheeks in a flame, by her hints and innuendoes about "cousin Robert"—for Elenor's especial edification—until she, in pity for the girl's blushes, turned the tables on May, by saying—

"You have not enquired about Stacey, May, but he did not forget you—let me whisper the message he charged me to give you—'Take care of my interest, cousin Elenor,' he said, 'and don't let anybody steal her away from me—tell her, I shall soon be able to propose another co-partnership, for I am now the junior member of the firm of Randal, Legare & Hamilton—attorneys at law;'" but she did not whisper so low, but Winnie could hear, and it was now May's turn to blush, which she did so furiously that the former clapped her hands in delight, saying—

"Thank you, Miss Elenor, now I shall be able to pay May in her own coin—though I suspected as much before—so mend your ways Miss May, or you shall not hear the last of Stacey Hamilton."

"I know Stacey is a special friend of mine, Winnie, so you need not imagine you have learned a great secret; and I like him very much—especially Miss Elenor, since I knew

he was *your* cousin," said May, trying to appear quite unconscious of anything more than a mere boy and girl friendship.

"Yes, May, you need not be ashamed of the friendship, for Stacey is a noble boy—a little spoiled by indulgence perhaps, but he is being cured of that, as he takes his place of trust and responsibility in the world, and I think the influence of a certain little girl, would do much toward making a fine character of my cousin, one of these days," returned Elenor, as she looked fondly at the blushing girl, and thought of the sweet vanished hope she had once entertained of being an influence for good, in the life of a lover—the dearest and bonniest that ever woman had—and lost!

In the evening, Temple Gwynn came to welcome his friends and favorites—for no one in Clinton, or the neighborhood could rival these two in his regard. Yet he was one of the few men who had come within the sphere of Elenor's magnetic influence who did not love her (in the usual acceptation of the word) but entertained for her a pure and disinterested regard, so rare between young persons of opposite sexes—and she too felt for him a sister's affection; never having had a brother on whom to lavish that pure, almost holy, love—that is so different from all other. And this feeling grew, and strengthened in their hearts, until a few years later it was cemented by Temple's marriage to her cousin—Maud Hamilton.

Elenor was surprised when she was fairly installed in her pleasant home at the Hall, at the interest with which she entered into all her uncle's plans, and found what a panacea occupation is for the human heart, and how much life still held for her of calm enjoyment and quiet content.

The new furniture had arrived and quite a change in the order of things was soon effected, and so great was the

improvement, that Elenor was in raptures, and said she thought even fastidious Miss Howard would be satisfied.

“And now, Nellie,” said her uncle when everything was complete, “your portrait must be hung, and then I wish you to drive over in the new phaeton (that will be a surprise for your aunt Lilian too) and tell Lily and Walter to come over to-morrow—I have not said a word to them about the portrait, or the new furniture, as I wished to surprise them.”

But Col. Stacey had another object also in getting his niece away for a few hours. He had ordered a handsome new piano as a present to her, and to-day the wagon had gone to the railway-station to bring it, and would arrive while she was absent—for he wished to surprise her too. She returned just before tea, and after they left the table he said—

“Nellie, come into the parlor, and let us see how your portrait looks by lamp-light,” for he had bid the servant light the room while they were at supper. The door was open, and right under the smiling, life-like picture of herself, stood a splendid, grand piano—open and inviting the touch of her skilful fingers.

“Why!—I did not know—this was not here when I left—uncle!” she turned and saw Col. Stacey smiling at her bewildered expression, as he took her hand, and with mock courtesy said,

“Allow me, Miss Stacey,” and seated her on the handsome stool in front of it. “Try it, Nellie, it is yours, my dear—a gift from your loving uncle and guardian.”

Elenor turned, and throwing her arms around his neck, kissed him again and again, saying, when she had finished the operation of kissing—“Oh, you dear, good uncle! how shall I ever thank you! I have been wondering what I should do without a piano, and did not like to think of your taking the old one from Winnie—Oh, I thank you a thousand times!”

"Nine hundred and ninety-nine times too many, my dear—but you have not tried it."

"I will now, if I can command my nerves sufficiently after the startling, but pleasant surprise," and Elenor ran her hands over the keys, and pronounced the tone exquisite. Then she played a beautiful arrangement of "Home Again," with variations.

"Sing it, Nellie," said her uncle, when she had finished the instrumental piece, "I like the words, and they are especially appropriate now."

* * * * *

Major Stacey and his wife came over the next morning, and when they were shown into the parlor, you can imagine their surprise. Mrs. Stacey exclaimed (a woman is always first to speak on such occasions, or any other, for that matter).

"Well, Fred! I *am* astonished — as you intended I should be. I don't know which most to admire—the portrait, the furniture, or the piano; but the picture is your living image, Elenor—where was it painted, and who was the artist? tell me all about it."

"'Thereby hangs a tale,'" said Col. Stacey looking roguishly at his niece, "get Nellie to tell you about the artist—poor fellow! I expect he kept a copy—she refused him the original."

"Uncle Fred! hush! I cannot bear to think or speak lightly of Mr. De Lancey—he was the artist, aunt Lilian, and it was painted in Venice. Unfortunately he fell in love with the foolish face he was copying, and I was more sorry than I can tell you—for he was such a noble, handsome man—but I could not love him as he deserved to be loved, and was obliged to refuse him. I think it hurt him very much—but I hope he was not really unhappy long." And Elenor looked quite sad as she recalled this episode of her life abroad, that had really given her pain.

“ ‘Men have died and been eaten of worms—but never of love’—so don’t vex your tender heart, Nellie,” said her uncle Walter gayly.

“ I hope that it is so, at least, in Mr. De Lancey’s case, uncle Walter, but I believe men have died of love, Shakespeare to the contrary notwithstanding,” returned Elenor.

“ It may be so, Nellie, but I have never known a case—let us hope your promising artist escaped with his life, at any rate—for he would be a great loss to the profession—your portrait is certainly finely executed, and a remarkably good likeness,” says Major Stacey.

“ It is just lovely !” put in his wife, “ but you must let us hear the tone of your piano, Nellie, when we have seen the other rooms. I am so glad you have done this, Fred—it is really refreshing ; ‘ old things are best,’ in some instances, but not old furniture, for a new bride.”

If they had been charmed with the parlor, they were no less so with Elenor’s beautiful room—with its handsome appointments, and the bridal-chamber—which was even more exquisite. The arrangement of this room had indeed been a labor of love to Elenor ; the selection of each nook and appropriate place for every article of furniture, the hanging of the pictures to suit her artistic eye, and please the esthetic taste of the woman who would grace it—she undertook herself, with the aid of efficient servants, and had actually shut out her uncle Fred, until all was complete—even to the dainty looping of the rose-lined lace curtains, and filling the rare vases with lovely flowers.

“ Fred, I hope your bride-elect is pretty enough to harmonize with her surroundings ; I should hate to see an ugly, ungraceful woman presiding over the dear old place—is Miss Howard pretty, Nellie ?” asked Mrs. Stacey, as they came out, and Elenor, locked the door of the sacred bridal-chamber, putting the key in her pocket.

“ I do not know, aunt Lillian, I have never thought of

it," replied Elenor, "I only know she is very sweet and lovable to *me*—you must ask uncle Fred if she is pretty."

"I think you have answered the question satisfactorily, my dear," said her uncle. "I do not suppose in the estimation of those who did not love her, Miss Howard would be considered pretty; but when you come to know her, Lily, I don't think you will have any difficulty in deciding the question. Let us have the music now, Nellie—I want your aunt's opinion of the instrument."

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"By the way, Fred," said his brother a little later, "you have never told us how your suit against that horrid woman terminated."

"Have I not? Well, she gave us the slip—in other words, left for parts unknown; and Nellie's tender heart, and Eveline's Christian charity, prevailed with me to leave her to the avenging Nemesis of her own conscience—but I very much doubt if her easy conscience proves a very terrible avenger," said Col. Stacey.

"Ah, Nellie, how could you plead for the wicked creature?" said her uncle Walter. "I have not so much grace; and confess, I am sorry she has escaped the retribution, she so richly merits."

"But has she escaped, uncle Walter? Let us leave her in the hands of Him who saith—'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,'" returned the noble girl, whose life this woman had wellnigh wrecked! Yet I think she has forgiven even her!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BUT our heroine did not find her life entirely marred—as we have said—because she had lost the one supreme, and highest joy it contained for her. No : in spite of itself youth is elastic, and young exuberant health and spirits, are not easily crushed, and Elenor was happier than she had believed it possible to be, amid the scenes of her short-lived engagement, and its sad ending.

And during the time that elapsed before her uncle's marriage, she had little chance to indulge in retrospect. She vibrated between Roselawn, Aspendale, and the Hall, and a keen observer would hardly have detected any change from the bright, sunny Elenor of those untroubled days when the star of Hope shone o'er her pathway—so successfully did the brave girl conceal from every eye, the least trace of the deep wound her heart had received.

She never tired of hearing of her dead father—her noble grandparents, and the gentle girl, her uncle had loved and lost. The dear old home—each nook and corner of house and grounds—had a new and tender interest for her. And to Maumer Cinthy's long yarns, she lent a willing ear—of the good old times when, “ole massa and mistis lib'd, and your pa was de finest young man in all dese parts—ah, honey;” the old woman would say, “I'se so thankful de good Lord have let me lib to see Mass Jack's chile in her fader's house. Wish ole mistis could a seed it too, fer you is de very spit of her, chile ; I was a little gal when massa fetched her from ole Virginy, but I 'members how she looked at dat time, and you is her own chile in your like-

ness. I know massa went in de coach and four arter her, and my daddy was de driver, and my brudder Simon, he went 'long too, up on de dickey wid daddy, to open de gates and let down de long steps dey used to have to de carriages in dem days—Oh, I tell you honey, 'twas gran! nothin like it now, wid de little weak pha't'ns, as dey call um, dat can't bar de wate of a good big ole Virginy nigger. And jes ter think! Mass Fred gwine to be married at las; laws a massy, but I is glad, 'cause I's gitten too ole to tend to dis 'stablishment any how, and you is too young honey—so I thanks de good Lord dat sen somebody ter take keer of him when I's done ded and gone.”

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Swiftly the day rolled round that had been fixed for Col. Stacey's marriage, and now he has gone for his bride, and Elenor is staying at Aspendale, during his absence. They were to be married and return at once to the Hall—for both had had enough of travel—so none of the family accompanied him. Hugh, his wife, and Mr. Randal were the only persons present to witness the quiet, but impressive ceremony—except, of course the family—that took place in the Hamilton drawing-room; Mr. Hamilton giving away the bride.

The short December day, threw their arrival into the dusk of the evening, and Mrs. Stacey and Elenor had thrown open all the blinds, and had every room brilliantly lighted from basement to garret. The grounds too were illuminated with Chinese lanterns, and over the front entrance of the portico was a transparency showing conspicuously the words—WELCOME TO THE MISTRESS OF STACEY HALL. The whole presented a beautiful and cheering scene, as you entered the large gate that opened from the high-road into the smooth, level carriage-drive that traversed the spacious lawn.

“Look, Mass Fred! sumthin' mus' be afire,” said the

coachman, (Maumer Cinthy's son—named Simon for his illustrious uncle, aforesaid); and Col. Stacey looking out, knew in a moment, that it was a welcome Lily and Elenor had planned in honor of his bride.

“Do look, Eveline!” he said, “is it not bright and pretty? I trust it is an earnest of the new light and beauty that you will henceforth shed over my home, dear wife; Nellie's loving heart planned this in *your* honor, I know—for I knew nothing of it.”

“Dear child! How glad I shall be to see her—yes, it is beautiful, and looks like a fairy scene, and an enchanted palace, where the queen of the fairies is holding her revels,” returned Mrs. Eveline, while her heart throbbed with pleasure, as she neared her future home with the man by her side—whom she so truly loved and admired.

The carriage swept around the circular drive, amid the gleaming lights, and drew up in front of the portico, where the family from Aspendale and Elenor, were gathered to welcome them. Hearty greetings and congratulations were soon exchanged, and Elenor carried her new aunt up to the dainty bridal-chamber to rest and change her dress before she came down to the elegant supper prepared for the occasion.

“O Nellie! how lovely!” exclaimed Mrs. Eveline, as Elenor threw open the door of the pretty bedroom—bright with a cheerful wood-fire, and fragrant with rare flowers—and bid her enter. “I can see your exquisite taste, my dear, in all this, and I thank you. What a sweet home you and I have found, my child, and how grateful we should be that a kind Father has brought us, after all our trials to this safe haven of rest and peace, and to the loving protection of your noble uncle—and my husband!”

“I am glad you like it, dear sister—let me call you so still, it is the dearest name to me,” said Elenor, and very

inconsistently, she threw her arms around her friend, and burst into tears.

“What ! tears, Nellie—are you sorry to have me for an aunt ?”

“No, oh no,—I am very, very glad—uncle must have told you—what I also wrote—that I would have chosen you from the whole world for his wife ; and I can hardly tell you why I weep—partly from joy, I suppose, and partly because I am selfish enough to feel just a little bit sorry that I shall no longer be *first* in your heart—or in uncle’s—there is no one now, to love *me best*. Am I not foolish ?”

“No, dear ; only mistaken—for the love we bear each other is entirely different, and does not take a grain, from that we feel for you—how could it ? So you are still our only *best-loved*, Nellie—does that satisfy you ?” asked Mrs. Eveline, kissing her fondly.

“It ought to, at any rate,” returned Elenor smiling. “Now sit here in this sleepy-hollow of a chair, and tell me about aunt Ellen, and all of them, while you rest.”

* * * * *

“Mrs. Lillian gave her brother-in-law and his bride a reception the next evening at Aspendale—but only a small circle of their most intimate friends were present—for Col. Stacey was so averse to crowds, he would only consent to accept the compliment, on her promising this. He had always contended that marriage was too sacred a thing to be the subject of idle gossip, and prying curiosity, and believed the first, sweet, self-engrossed weeks, should be passed after the English fashion, instead of on crowded railways, and amid the noisy glare of a fashionable hotel or watering-place—as the American manner is.

Mrs. Eveline soon won her way to the hearts of all—even Miss Jemima could find nothing spiteful to say of her—for she was one of the few women that disarm criticism, and “who have a rare social witchery, with no other form

of genius ; and an art of pleasing, that amounts to fascination.”

* * * * *

The few weeks that remained to them before the legislature convened, passed all too rapidly, and it was with a feeling of regret, that Col. Stacey, his wife and niece, left their happy home, to mingle awhile in the gay society of the capital. Yet it was with some, very excusable, pride, that he thought of having two such attractive women to grace the fashionable circles, in which he had been so popular the winter previous.

Nor was he disappointed in thinking that his wife and Elenor, could not fail to make a pleasing and lasting impression on all who enjoyed the honor of their acquaintance ; for there are doubtless many who will remember the elegant and refined Mrs. Stacey, and her beautiful niece the belle *par excellence*, of the State capital, in the winter of 18—. And her many admirers have not forgotten how in their revenge for the indifference with which she regarded their tender protestations, they bestowed on her the paradoxical *sobriquet* of the “tropical iceberg”—her warm Southern beauty, contradicting so palpably her (apparently) cold, unimpressible heart. But the reader, who has sympathized in all that loving heart has suffered, knows it was a misnomer, and that only *one* voice ever had power to stir its passionate depths ; and that voice now—must not, *cannot* speak !

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It is again October—a year has passed when we return to see how it has fared with our hero, and his gentle wife. Hugh has risen rapidly in his profession, and Ada's *ambition* is satisfied in regard to her husband—if not her love—but will that suffice for any woman? And her little girl, now ten months old, is lovely and winning enough to gladden the heart of the most exacting mother—and she is the light and joy of Ada's life—but while the child has grown in strength and beauty, the loving mother has been fading—slowly fading.

In the spring, when his wife first showed signs of failing health, Hugh was very uneasy, but the doctor quieted his fears by saying—"It is nursing the child—she must give that up." And though it was a great trial to Ada to give up this sweetest privilege of a mother, she could not resist Hugh's pleadings, and her physician's advice. A wet nurse was procured, a healthy Irish woman, to whom the child took kindly—but when the summer advanced, and still Ada did not improve, the doctor said she must try a more bracing climate.

To the mountains they go for the summer—Hugh leaving all business, to devote himself with untiring attention, and tender solicitude to his wife; and when the chill autumn days have brought them back to the city, he feels with increased anxiety, that little benefit has been attained. Which was true; for the cause of Ada's failing health, lay too deep for earthly skill to reach. Day after day and month after month, had she hoped—and hoped in vain—to win her husband's more perfect love, until all hope was

dead and despair reigned in her soul ; for she knew that into the inner sanctuary of his heart, she would never enter—that on that sacred altar was still enthroned the woman, who but for her, would have slept on the bosom, whose fountains are sealed to her—who would have crowned his life with a completeness, which now it lacked. For though Hugh was a kind and tender husband, Ada felt in every fibre of her being—that it was the tenderness of duty, the kindness of a generous, chivalrous nature, rather than the spontaneous love and devotion, a man yields to the wife who is dearer than all else to him. Perhaps Hugh himself was not conscious of the difference that was so keenly felt by the wife, who yearned so intensely for his entire and perfect love.

But one thing is sure — Hugh did strive with all his high-souled, generous nature, to do his whole duty—hoping that in his tender, ceaseless care and affection, Ada might not miss the deeper, more passionate love, it was not in his power to give. Honestly did he endeavor to crush out all thought of her whom he had loved with an idolatrous love, and to forget “the face that was fatally fair.”

* * * * *

Hugh had never called Ada, *darling* — not once in all their married life ; that name was sacred to the one peerless woman who had now dropped out of his life ; yet never could his lips bestow the sweet, pet name on any other being—not even his child.

“My dear wife,” he said to her one day, a few weeks after their return home, when Ada seemed weaker, and more depressed than usual, “why is it that nothing seems to cheer, or make you better ? It distresses me to see you thus—let me write for May to come, would you not like to have her ?” and Hugh leaned tenderly over the couch, drawn in front of the bright coal fire, which the cool October days made a necessity to the delicate invalid—and

taking one of her thin hands, pressed it caressingly to his lips. Tears sprang to her eyes at his tender solicitude, but she replied quietly, striving to subdue all emotion—

“You are very kind, Hugh, but I do not know that anything will help me—though I have thought, if I could go back once more to the dear old home, and see them all, it might cheer me, at least; and I long to show them my pretty darling.” Ada had caught a trick of saying, “my baby—my darling,” never “our”—I suppose she felt keenly the price she had paid for it, and that *her baby* was the only, and dearest thing she had gained by her marriage with Hugh—the only compensation for lack of the love she had coveted, with a yearning that would never be satisfied.

“You shall go, my dear—why did you not say so before? Get ready as soon as you can, and I will take you and Lily-bud,” replied Hugh, brightening at the idea of anything that would give her pleasure, and possible benefit.

“But Hugh, how can you leave your business? and I have taken you away so much the past summer.”

“Duty, before business—and my dear wife’s health and happiness, before everything else, for me,” he said, smiling kindly on her. “I can take you there very well, and return for the holidays—that will give me ample time—so go to work, and get ready. I will write to your father to send to the station next Thursday—can you make your arrangement to leave so soon?”

“Oh yes, there is nothing to do, but pack our trunks; I shall need little dressing, unless I improve very much, and Lily May has an ample supply on hand,” Ada says, with more of interest in her tone, than Hugh had heard for many a day.

“Will Catherine be willing to go, and take care of the child, do you think?”

“I think she will; she is so devoted to her, and did not hesitate about going with us in the summer.”

“Well, you had better find out at once, so you can get another nurse, if she is unwilling to go. Now, cheer up, dear wife, and let me see you look more like my bright Ada of other days.” Hugh kissed his wife and went away to his office, then the poor woman gave vent to her suppressed emotion, and sobs shook her fragile form, while she murmured to herself—“It is no use—he is blind, blind! He will not see that I am dying for his love, and while that is denied me, nothing will do me any good! But I had rather die with my loved ones round me, and be laid to rest by my sweet mother’s side—yes, when I leave this home—where I had fondly hoped to be so happy—I know it will be, never to return. Oh! it is hard to miss the one love, that is more than all else to you, almost dearer than your hopes of heaven—and to die because you have missed it!”

* * * * *

“Catherine,” said Mrs. Legare an hour or so later, as the nurse came in from taking the child out for a ride, in her elegant little carriage (a gift from Mr. Randal), “I am going to my old home in Georgia next week—will you go with me and take care of my baby?”

“Indade, mum, it’s meself that would hate to give up me swate darlint—is it very far, mum?”

“Not very far, Catherine, in these days of railroads—in fact, hardly so far as we went last summer.”

“Well, mum, if you plase, I think I’ll go—but I must see me mither the day, and know how me own puir orfin is thrivin’. I can send the wage to help um, can’t I, mum?”

“Oh yes, I can send it for you by post-office order, in a letter every week, as I did before—there will be no difficulty about that.”

“Thank you, mum—then I may say, I will go, if me mither don’t fret. Me babby is took good care of, and its

not him as I'm after bein' afeard to leave—but his granny, if she should be took wid the sickness."

"Well, leave the baby with me, Catherine, and go and see your mother, for I must know at once, what you will do. Put her down and let her walk to me—my dear little daughter! Will not grandpapa and aunties be glad to see you, darling!"

The little girl—who was a remarkably precocious child—was beginning to toddle about, and to lisp the names of her parents and nurse, which was a new source of interest and delight to the fond mother. She had been named for Hugh's and Ada's only sisters—Lilian May—but her father's pet name for her was Lily-bud—and strangely enough, the little thing was even fonder of him, than of her mother.

The family at Roselawn had been for some time aware of Ada's delicate health, but hoped that her sojourn among the mountains would restore her—and their anxiety was newly awakened, when Hugh's letter came saying—"Ada will be with you next Thursday, to spend some time, and try the effect of home air, and the society of the dear ones, she is longing to see. You must not be surprised to find her changed—for she is quite feeble at present—but I am hoping so much, from this visit to her old home, which she could not undertake during your enervating summer, or I should not have delayed so long, to bring her to you."

May was in ecstasies at the prospect of seeing her little niece and namesake—while her father, and aunt Mary, rejoiced with trembling.

Elenor could not help a feeling of regret, when she learned that Hugh and his wife were expected. She was afraid of herself—afraid to meet again the man, whose presence brought the past so vividly before her, with its hopes and memories—so sweet then, so torturing now! Yes, she dreaded a sight of Hugh.

CHAPTER XXXV.

BUT Hugh only remained long enough to see his wife somewhat rested from the fatigue of her journey, and cheered by the glad welcome of the dear home circle—and then he left her—promising to return for the holidays or sooner, if she needed him.

And so the meeting Elenor deprecated did not take place—and though she knew it was only deferred—still it was a relief for the time—and she rather liked the thought of seeing Ada, if Hugh was not by—so after a few days, she and her aunt Eveline went over to Roselawn, to call on her.

At sight of the faded, delicate invalid, Elenor's only emotion was tenderest pity and sympathy, as she clasped her in a warm embrace, and murmured tearfully—"I am so sorry to see you so unwell, dear friend—but you will soon be stronger I trust, with your good father's advice, and breathing your native air. Where is the little girl, aunt Mary? I am anxious to see her," she said, turning to Miss Thornton, and giving place at Ada's couch to her aunt.

There was no room now to harbor bitter feelings (though she had really never done so) towards this frail creature, on whom it was so plain that Death had set his signet; ah, no—but instead, her whole heart was touched and grieved to see Ada so changed, from the bright, healthful girl she had known.

"May has the baby somewhere, go and bring her Catherine," replied aunt Mary, and very soon May came in, bearing her little niece proudly in her arms, and putting her on Elenor's lap said—

"Isn't she the sweetest thing you ever saw, Miss Elenor? Oh, I do love her so dearly!"

"She is a dear little creature, May, and I do not wonder that you love her," and Elenor bent and kissed the childish lips and brow, so like Hugh's—for the little girl was a delicate, perfect miniature of her father—with her golden curls and lovely blue eyes. Did a presentment dawn on Elenor then—as she clasped and kissed the wee thing—of what this little image of Hugh, was destined to be to her, in the years to come?

Very soon Dr. Singleton came in, with his cheerful greeting—"Ah, good afternoon, Mrs. Stacey—and Nellie—now isn't grandpa's baby a beauty? and so sensible—as a proof of this, she took to me from the first, and seemed to know by intuition who, and what I am to her. She is too smart I am afraid, with her wise, womanly little ways—come to grandpa, darling." They all laughed at the old doctor's enthusiasm over his first grandchild, while Ada said—

"It is not so strange, papa, or any evidence of unusual brightness, that the child should have known you—for I have talked to her so much of 'grandpa' that no doubt it seemed quite right and natural for her to see and recognize you."

"Pshaw! it is not that, daughter—the child has just got more sense than her share, and there have been several idiots in consequence—eh, my pet?" protested the old gentleman, while the little girl smiled, as though she quite understood it all, and lisped—"eth."

"And Ada is much better, Mrs. Stacey—" continued Dr. Singleton. "Georgia air will soon set her up again. You are looking quite bright this afternoon, daughter."

"It is the pleasure of meeting old friends, dear papa, that has cheered me so," replied the invalid. Indeed Ada had learned to love the noble Eveline Howard very much—

during that lady's sojourn with the Hamilton's—and Miss Howard—who had heard all the particulars of Ada's marriage, from Col. Stacey—felt a tender sympathy and interest in the gentle girl, who had been induced to wed the man she had loved all her life, with the hope and assurance from him, and his friends—that she could add to his happiness, and comfort him in his bitter disappointment; (that she had failed was through no fault of hers) and she devoted much of her time when in Baltimore to cultivating Ada's acquaintance.

“And do you not think I might ride over and spend to-morrow with Lily, papa?” asked Ada, “I am so anxious to see all the old familiar places.”

“I think you might, my dear, if you are feeling as well in the morning, as now,” returned her father.

“And then we shall claim a day at the Hall, Mrs. Legare—may we not?” asked Mrs. Eveline.

“Thank you, Mrs. Stacey, I shall be very glad to go, if I have strength enough.”

“We must not tire you, then, on our first visit—come Nellie, if you can leave that little cherub, we must go. I wish to see a sick child in the village, before we return.”

* * * * *

Elenor did not let many days pass after this, without seeing Ada; and her heart went out in a yearning love, and a truer affection for the woman who before, she had always looked upon somewhat in the light of a rival—but now that she was Hugh's wife, and a patient, uncomplaining sufferer, she took her into her heart, without reserve. And her society and tender ministrations, became one of Ada's chief, and most comforting pleasures—while Elenor nobly endeavored to show herself so cheerful and satisfied in her life, that no fear of having marred her happiness, might disturb the last days of the loving wife and mother.

But not all the tender love and untiring devotion of friends and kindred, could stay the relentless hand of Death, that was slowly, but surely nearing the heartstrings of the doomed woman—she grew gradually frailer and weaker day by day, until even her fond father could no longer cheat his heart with the delusive hope that she would live. No, his darling was fading—going as her mother had gone before her, ay, even younger; for disappointed hopes and secret grief, preying on the tender sensitive heart, had developed the seeds of consumption that might have perhaps longer lain dormant in a contented, happy life, and a perfectly requited love. Yet who shall say? and who shall we blame? Shall we arraign the husband, who had so faithfully striven to do his whole duty? Shall we condemn the girl who was defrauded of her lover, through the base falsehoods of a wicked woman? Or the mistaken sister, for her unfortunate effort to repair her brother's wrecked happiness? Shall we blame the poor woman herself—who is weak enough to pine and die, for the deeper, undivided love she could not win?

* * * * *

Christmas brought Hugh, and with him came Stacey and Maud Hamilton, on a visit to their uncles. Neither of them had been to Georgia since they were quite young, and Mrs. Hamilton yielded to their earnest wish to accept an invitation from her brothers, (and Elenor's entreaties) to spend the holidays amid the scenes of her girlhood—at Aspendale and the Hall; and the only drawback to the pleasure all anticipated, was Ada's rapid decline—for within a few weeks, it was perceptible to all, that the footsteps of the silent messenger, had been greatly accelerated.

We know that there was a stronger attraction even than kindred for Stacey Hamilton, who had long contemplated this visit, and only waited for May to graduate, before he presented himself in the character of a suitor for her hand;

for he had learned enough of Dr. Singleton's rigid notions, to know that he would not tolerate a lover, while his daughter was still a school-girl.

Hugh was shocked at the change in his wife, and for the first time, began to realize the serious nature of her illness, and bitterly reproached himself, for remaining so long away from her; while in reality, Ada was the cause—for she wrote cheerful letters of her condition, and would not suffer any of the family to apprise Hugh of anything that might awaken his fears, or hasten his coming.

Mrs. Walter Stacey felt it her duty, as well as pleasure to try and make the time pass agreeably to Stacey and Maud; and on Christmas, she gave them a small but select party at Aspendale. Elenor had not yet seen Hugh—but his sister begged he would come to her party, if only for a little while; and Ada joined her persuasions, when the evening came round.

“Do go, dear,” she urged, “I am quite comfortable, and it will be pleasant for you to meet old friends, whom you have not seen for so long.”

So, quite late—when Ada had been prepared for the night's rest, that was only obtained now, by the use of opiates—Hugh took his way to Aspendale, through the moonlit meadows, by the little footpath he had trod so often in his happy boyhood, and bright young manhood. Ah, how changed—how different was his life, from what he had planned! “Man proposes, but God disposes,” came with overwhelming force to his mind, as he walked slowly and sadly the well-remembered path. And now he saw, he knew his wife was dying! Did the thought bring a throb of gladness to his heart, that at last, he would be *free*? I have failed to paint truly the character of my hero, if the reader can imagine such a thing for a moment!

And to-night he and Elenor will look on each other's faces for the first time since that trying ordeal in Balti-

more. But surely they can meet calmly and indifferently now, time must have dimmed and deadened the love that once glowed with such fervor in the hearts of both? It is only a poetic fancy that love cannot die—even “first and passionate love”—as theirs had been! Let them answer!

* * * * *

The night was waning—it had been a quiet, pleasant gathering—Mrs. Stacey would not allow dancing, under the circumstances, and Ada's condition weighed on the hearts of all. Elenor and Stacey Hamilton were promenading on the colonnade (the cousins were very fond of each other), having a little confidential talk, when Hugh came out to enjoy a cigar. He paused as he saw them, and would have retreated, but Elenor spoke, arresting his steps; he turned, and replied to her indifferent remark about the beauty of the night, and then—led on by an impulse he could not resist—he said,

“Stacey, let me have the pleasure of your cousin's society a little while, and you join the gayer party in the drawing-room.” As Stacey left them, he asked—“Does my cigar annoy you, Miss Elenor?”

“Oh no, I rather like it in the open air,” replied Elenor.

“I remember you used not to mind my smoking,” he said, then after a little silence—“Will you walk with me under the aspens, Elenor?”

“The moonlight is certainly very tempting—but you will not appreciate it now, since you are a dignified, prosaic *pater familias*,” Elenor says lightly—for she saw he was strangely excited and felt his arm trembling, as she laid her hand within it.

“I fear I shall appreciate it only too keenly to-night,” he made answer, “for it brings back so vividly, ‘the memory of the past’—do you remember that old song, Nellie—

and how I loved to hear you sing it? Little thinking it would one day be my fate to say so truly—

‘ Yet, in that bitter cup now filled with sorrow—
Is *one sweet drop*—the mem’ry of the past.’ ”

“ O God ! to know that it is all that remains to me of happiness !” he continued passionately, as he led her out under the aspens, and into the night, that was so perfect a repetition of the never-to-be-forgotten one, that was a sweet, hidden memory in the heart of each.

“ Hugh, Hugh ! how dare you talk so ! I will not listen to you—let us return ;” said Elenor, as soon as she could rouse herself from the shock his words had caused.

“ Nellie, for God’s sake hear me for one moment ! I will never offend again—but you cannot know how I have longed all these years to say—‘ forgive me, and do not hate me for my weakness and seeming want of faith !’ and yet it was neither—for while I can never fully explain my position to you, I can truly say, that I never for a moment believed the infamous falsehood—but I had lost heart and hope, and *you* were to blame for that, Nellie. Say that you forgive, and do not hate me, darling !” Oh, how he lingered on the sweet word, that he had said only in his heart all these miserable years !

“ There is nothing to forgive, Hugh, and I have never had an unkind, or hard thought towards you,” she replied, not checking this time his passionate outburst.

“ Then you never loved me, Nellie, as I loved you—for you can be happy, while I—”

“ Take care, Hugh ! Let us change the subject, the past is a forbidden one to us. How is your wife, and my little pet ? Though Ada must be better, or you would not have left her to-night,” returned Elenor, trying thus to turn his thoughts, to the duty and reticence, he owed his wife and child—not without effect.

“Ada was comfortable, and insisted on my coming—little dreaming, I should so far forget myself, and all I owe to her. God forgive me! And may He forget me, if I so sin again! But I shall be calmer, happier, now that I have spoken—and you have forgiven me, Elenor. I am ready to return.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HUGH had given up all thought of returning with Stacey and Maud—for Robert had told him, what his own heart feared, that Ada would be with them but a few weeks longer, at most—but the end came sooner than even Dr. Brent had anticipated.

It was the day before Stacey and Maud Hamilton had fixed for their departure, and Ada insisted that they, and the families from Aspendale and the Hall, with Winnie—Robert’s bride-elect—should spend it at Roselawn; as she could not go to them. Her father remonstrated—fearing the excitement, in her weak state—but she pleaded—

“Let me see them all together once more, dear papa—it is the last time; and I want to take each dear face with me when I go—Robert’s winsome bride, that is to be, and May’s future husband, I feel she will be happy with Stacey. Let me have my way in this, as you have always done, papa—it will not hurt me, I think,” and the sorrowing old man, could not find it in his heart to oppose her longer.

“Anything,” he said to himself, “that will give her a moment’s pleasure—though it hasten the end.”

And so they all came. Ada had not seen Elenor and Hugh together, except for a few moments one day, when the former came to make her excuses for not visiting the

invalid, as often as she had done, before her cousins' arrival.

"You know, dear," she had said on that occasion, "I am quite occupied in trying to make a country visit, endurable to my city-bred cousins, but they will soon be gone, and I shall be at your service—you have only to say, 'come.'"

"Thank you, dear friend—you are very kind; yes, let me see you as often as possible, when they are gone—I have not long to be with you," replied the gentle sufferer. Elenor promised, kissed her good-by, and left her. Hugh, on some pretext had gone out, very soon after Elenor entered the room—so until this re-union day, Ada had not seen them in each other's society. And she could not help observing—what perhaps a less interested person would not have noticed—how they each strove to appear calm and indifferent, yet failed utterly; and the thought would intrude—"I shall not stand between them long!" It was a bitter reflection; and pierced the poor loving heart with a keen pang—she had loved him so! aye, as devotedly, perhaps more unselfishly, than the woman whose love, had been repaid tenfold! We must pardon the natural, human weakness, she had not yet quite overcome—even though she knew she was passing away from earth's loves, and its jealousies—the knowledge that her husband, her darling! would soon be free to love another, was more than she could bear!

Yet on the whole, the day passed pleasantly—in a subdued, quiet way. The two pair of lovers were much to themselves—making sly excuses to haunt solitary nooks and corners; but at last, they were all gathered in Ada's room to say farewell, and brought vividly to her mind the long parting so soon to take place between her, and all she held dear in this world!

Stacey Hamilton took her hand—he knew it was for

the last time—his beloved May's dear, only sister, and strong young man that he was, emotion choked his utterance. Ada raised herself in bed, excitement gave her strength—"Be kind to my sweet May—love her always, Stacey. God bless you! and may we meet, where parting is no more!" It was all she could say—Stacey bent and kissed the pallid lips, too much moved to reply; and as he laid her gently back on her pillow, the red, life-blood gushed in a stream from her lips, and she swooned away. All was consternation! Her father, hearing the screams, hastened to her room—what a sight met his gaze!

"Run for Robert!" he managed to gasp—"I can do nothing," and he sank into a chair by her bedside, and took her hand, to assure himself that life was not yet extinct. Hugh had stood "like one to marble turned"—looking on at the ghastly work of death—helpless, speechless!

"Go, Hugh, you will be quicker than anyone else," it was Elenor who spoke; her voice roused him from his stupor, and he sped like lightning out of the house, and found Robert at the office, preparing to visit some of his patients—but he was soon hastening with Hugh, to the dying cousin, who was still very dear to him.

Elenor, calmer than the rest, was at Ada's bedside, wiping the pale lips, from which the blood still oozed slowly.

"Robert, save her! she is not dead, she must not die, my darling!" mourned the stricken father, as Dr. Brent entered the room, and began to apply the usual restoratives; telling aunt Mary to clear the room of everyone, except herself and Dr. Singleton.

"She must have air—raise a window, please, Miss Elenor—and you might remain also, for I know your great self-control."

Mrs. Lillian led her brother into the library, and they

wept in each other's arms. "O Hugh! my poor brother, how shall I comfort you?"

"Lily, we have killed her! you and I—poor martyred saint—God forgive us!"

"Hugh, Hugh! hush! would you kill me too? Do not make me more unhappy than I am—take back those cruel words!" exclaimed his sister.

"Forgive me, Lily, I am crazed with remorse, and know not what I say. O God! lay not this sin to our charge!"

"Hugh, do not reproach yourself or me; did we not act for her best happiness, as we thought? then why blame ourselves? I do not think, under any circumstances, Ada would have lived long—her mother died of consumption, you know."

"Yes, I know—but if I could have made her happy, she might have been spared many years, and I did try—O Lily! how hard, none but God will ever know!"

"I know it, my brother, I know you could not fail to do your whole duty to the wife you promised at the altar to love and cherish—so do not reproach yourself—be comforted; God knows what is best for her, and for you."

"I *must* go and see her, Lily—she may want me, I will try to be calm."

Slowly Ada came out of the death-like swoon; too feeble at first to speak, she turned her eyes about the room, as if searching for some one she did not see. "It is Hugh," said Elenor, "I will go for him."

She met him at the door. "Ada has revived, and wants you, I think," she said, as she passed out and joined her aunt Lillian in the library. Hugh went up to the bedside of his dying wife, and taking her thin hand—already cold, with the chill his loving clasp could not warm—he bent his head beside her pillow, and wept silently.

"Don't, Hugh—do not weep for me, dear love—I shall soon be—at rest," she murmured brokenly.

“Hugh, try to be calm—do not excite her again ;” said Robert, “it is the day’s excitement that has done this. Ada, dear cousin, will you not let Hugh go now, and try to sleep ?”

“O Robert !”—I have so little time—I cannot waste it—in sleep,” she pleaded.

“But, darling, you will be better in the morning, if you will rest now, and try to sleep—then you shall talk as much as you wish,” urged her fond father.

“Papa—another day will never dawn—for me—I have much to say ;—stay with me, Hugh.”

“I will, dear—I will,” he faltered.

“Robert, let her have her way—it cannot change the issue,” whispered Dr. Singleton.

“Papa, I would be alone with Hugh—while I have strength—leave me awhile, dear ones. Aunt Mary, ask Lily and Elenor—not to go away to-night.” She seemed strangely calm and composed, now that she felt the end so near.

The short January day was closing in—like her life ; and upon that last sacred interview, during its twilight hours, we will not intrude. When Hugh came out, to order lights, and go in search of Elenor—whom she had asked to see—on his face rested a new peace, and in his eyes, a light and radiance, as though he had caught and held, something of the glory within the gates ajar, to receive her pure spirit !

“Dear Elenor—I have sent for you to talk on a subject upon which our lips have long been sealed,” said Ada feebly, after Elenor had taken a chair by her bed, and asked with tender solicitude how she was feeling, “but there is no longer any need that a veil should be drawn over our hearts—let all be made plain—” she paused, as if reluctant even then, to speak the next words : “Elenor, Hugh loves you still, and you love him—”

“O Ada ! dear friend, do not talk of that—do not make us both unhappy, by reverting to the past,” pleaded Elenor.

“It does not make me unhappy now, dear—it has done so—but that is over. I shall soon be where there is ‘no marrying or giving in marriage’—and I am content—I can die happy, if I know that you will take the place, that should have been yours—and yours only—when I am gone. Be a tender mother to my precious child, dear Elenor—never let her miss, or forget her mother—passed into the skies—talk to her of me sometimes, and tell her how I loved her—will you promise, Elenor ?”

“I promise, dear Ada, and may God so deal with me, as I deal with your darling !” replied Elenor, as audibly as she could for her sobs—for she was deeply moved.”

“Thank you, dear friend—I know you will keep your promise—seal it with a kiss—then tell them to bring my child—let her face be the last on which my fading sight shall linger, that if in Heaven I find some sweet, unmothered babe, like her—I’ll ask the good Shepherd to let me tend the little lamb, and cheat my heart with thinking, ‘tis my own.”

They brought the sleeping child ; and as they laid her in the loving arms—whose clasp was growing faint, and fainter—she murmured—“Do not take her from me again—let me die with her in my arms—“Ah me, my baby, my blossom, ah, my child ! My one sweet child, whom I shall see no more !” and so she slept—the dear ones watching.

E’er the morning dawned, she passed so gently from the natural sleep, to that which knows no waking, that the sad watchers would have been unconscious of the change, had not Robert—who at the moment was sitting with his finger on the flickering pulse—said as he left his seat by her death-couch, “She sleeps her last sleep—may she sleep well—poor, tired heart !”

There was no noisy outburst of grief, to disturb the

holy quiet of the dawn—the bitterness of death had passed. Gently they removed the sleeping babe, from the arms that would nevermore enfold her in this world, and reverently they robed the loved form for its last resting-place among

“The innumerable caravan, which moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death.”

* * * * *

Stacey Hamilton telegraphed the sad news to his father—and also, that he and his sister would remain until after the funeral. On the sad days that followed we need not linger. In each sorrowing heart there was hope of a happy re-union, and the comforting reflection that it was better, far better for their beloved! Each knew intuitively, that her life had not brought the happiness she coveted—and felt, it was better so; in Heaven, every longing would be satisfied—their darling would be *at rest*!

“And thus forever, throughout this wide world,
Is love a sorrow proving,
There are still many sorrowful things in life,
But the saddest of all is loving.
The life of some is worse than death,
For fate a high wall oft raises—
And *far better* than life, with two hearts estranged.
Is a low grave, starred with daisies.”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ANOTHER year has passed, and our story is drawing to its close. Dr. Singleton did not long survive his dear Ada, and several months have now elapsed since they laid him to rest, beside the two he loved best on earth. May is alone—no, not alone; though father and sister both have left her, she is not comfortless—she knows there is *one*, dearer yet than all others, who is still left to her—and Ada's little girl makes sunshine in her mother's home, and gladdens with her childish prattle, the sad hearts at Rose-lawn.

Hugh, in his lonely home, has not been idle, or entirely miserable:—true, he misses wife and child, and mourns the former truly and sincerely—recalling many points of beauty and excellence in her character, not wholly appreciated, when living. And he often thought with keen regret of his inability to give the full meed of love, the poor faithful heart coveted—but he did not suffer himself to dwell morbidly on the past—the future beckoned with its pleasing hopes—his sweet, shattered dream might yet become a reality; and though no word or sign, has passed between him and Elenor, they each knew the other was—*only waiting*.

* * * * *

Stacey and Robert, will not be put off any longer, and so May and Winnie are to be married the same night. The entire Hamilton family are to be present, and Hugh is coming too, for the first time since the death of his wife.

It was a beautiful and touching sight—the double marriage of the two sweet girls, and happy handsome bride-

grooms, in the little village church ; and as they followed the rector in the solemn and impressive ceremony, prayers and good wishes, went up from every heart, that the lives so blended here—in love and sweet companionship—might be re-united in Heaven ! They all repaired to Roselawn, after the service, where the evening passed quietly, but pleasantly with the now so closely united families, and a few intimate friends. Among these, was Temple Gwynn, who it was quite evident, was most happy to renew, and improve his acquaintance with Maud Hamilton—who grew more and more like her cousin (and his dear friend) Elenor—in appearance and character—and who, of course, he admired exceedingly, as after events showed.

Hugh was all impatience, until he could see Elenor alone ; for she, with her usual unselfishness, had been so engaged in assisting the fair brides—who thought no arrangement of their toilets exactly *au fait*, until it had been pronounced so by her—that he had felt quite ignored : but the long-hoped-for, the supreme, crowning moment had come at last !”

“O my darling ! my love ! are you really *my own* again ? and do you love me *now* as *then* ? Tell me that your love has not grown cold all these weary years !” murmured Hugh, as he folded to his eager longing heart in a frantic embrace, the woman he loved with an almost idolatrous love, as though he feared even now, something would again interpose to separate them.

Elenor was almost frightened at his vehemence, and found no word to say in her silent, overpowering emotion. “Speak, darling ! must I lose you now ? O God ! I could not bear it ! and I will *never* leave you again, Elenor, until we are bound together so fast, that naught but death can sever us !”

“Nothing but death,” echoed Elenor, “I am yours, dear Hugh—now and forever !” and she buried her face in

the fond, faithful bosom in an ecstasy of sweet content, that compensated for all the bitter past.

"I shall not return without you, my darling, my bride!" he said, when he had in some measure, lavished the long-repressed tenderness and affection of his heart, in every pet name and sweet caress, known in the calender of Love. "So you must at once see about that momentous affair—your *trousseau*; I will give you two weeks of grace—no more, and that is an age, to a man who has waited—so long."

"O Hugh! so soon? I could not have a *trousseau* prepared in that time."

"Yes, dear, you can order everything you wish sent from New York to Baltimore—so when we reach there, it will be ready. You will only require here, a simple white dress to be married in, for we will leave the next morning for our home—O darling, think of it! is not the thought sweet? *Our home!*"

And so it was settled. No one was surprised—in fact, had wondered rather, that Hugh waited so long. Mrs. Hamilton decided to remain until after her niece's marriage, before she returned to Baltimore, and the happy couples were to run down for a short bridal tour to "the land of flowers."

"Now, Miss Elenor," pleaded May and Winnie, "please don't change your mind, and get married before we return."

"No danger of that, you silly children—I do not like hurrying matters up so, anyway; but Hugh will not listen to reason, and aunt Ellen is urging me too," says Elenor demurely.

"Oh, I wish you would be married at once and go with us to Florida—please, cannot you, brother Hugh?"

"I suppose we could, May, but it takes two to make a bargain—ask her?" and Hugh smiled as he looked at

Elenor—who appeared not to hear, while she played with Lily May's golden curls, as the child leaned on her lap, prattling in her childish fashion—but presently she looked up, and said—

“Why, May, I think three newly married pairs, would be more than the impassioned people of sunny Florida could stand—beside, I do not care to serve as a foil to such youthful brides, as you and Winnie.”

“O Miss Elenor! as if anyone in the form of woman, would dare to think of rivalling you!” exclaimed her loyal admirer—Winnie Brent.

“Of course not,” returned May, “but then we might hope to shine in her reflected glory, if she would go with us.”

“It is well your two lords are not present to hear you casting *a reflection*, on the brightness of their jewels,” laughed Hugh.

“I think they would admit,” said Winnie, “that there are greater and lesser lights, and still be content with their stars of the second magnitude—because they shine for *them*—eh, May?”

“I think so—but let us look after our truants. I have no idea of being deserted so long, at this early date, for their after-dinner cigars.”

This conversation took place in the parlor at Aspendale—the day after the wedding—where a family party had dined with the newly married—to-morrow they were off for Florida.

* * * * *

Two weeks after, Elenor and Hugh were quietly married at the Hall—Col. Stacey, (her more than father) giving away the bride. Only the relations, and Temple Gwynn, were present—but Elenor looked lovely enough, in her pure India muslin, to have graced a coronet; her only ornament was a diamond broach—the gift of her uncle

Fred—that sparkled at her throat, where it clasped the filmy lace that encircled the high beautifully fitting corsage—whose transparent folds, softened, but did not wholly conceal the finely moulded neck and arms. And none of her friends felt that she lacked more costly attire, and all rejoiced, that at last, she and Hugh were united—until death !

Dr. Brent and Winnie were left sole occupants of Rose-lawn—as he had bought Hugh’s and May’s interest in the place—for aunt Mary was to make her home with May—the newer tie, of the little Lily May, also drawing her where she could be near the child—to whom she was much devoted.

For Hugh had determined to have his little girl in his own home, for the future, and was glad that aunt Mary would not be entirely separated from her. The two families at Aspendale and the Hall were quite sad (especially her dearly loved guardian and his wife) at losing their dear niece—but Mrs. Eveline had been gladdened by the birth of a fine boy, now several months old, and Maud and Wattie were growing more companionable to their parents—so they were not left entirely without compensation, in their loss of Elenor, and they all loved her too unselfishly not to rejoice in her happiness.

Some over-scrupulous reader may ask—“ Did Mrs. Fred Stacey continue a Roman Catholic ? ” This much I know—that Col. Stacey left his wife free, in her religion—hoping, perhaps, that she would gradually shake off its fetters voluntarily. And as there is no Catholic church nearer than the city of A——, Mrs. Stacey attends the Episcopal church regularly with her husband, and seems quite happy and content in its worship—so that I think he has great reason to wait patiently, and to hope.

* * * * *

As the years went by, other children came to bless

Hugh's home, yet his heart ever turned with greater tenderness, and his voice took a gentler tone, towards Ada's child—his blue-eyed, golden-haired Lily May. As for Elenor—she did not love her own dark-eyed little gypsies more fondly—aye, truly did she fulfil her promise to the dead mother !

Yet she often wondered, and regretted too, that neither of her children resembled their father—but so it was ; they were both—boy and girl—like her ; while the only perfect counterpart of him she loved with a daily increasing affection, was Ada's little daughter !

And as the child grows into girlhood, she is becoming Elenor's greatest comfort ; and strangers observe the devotion of Mrs. Legare to that sweet, gentle, eldest daughter—and have no need to ask—

“ Whose child is this ?

The gesture saying so tenderly, ‘ my own.’ ”

And Hugh ? Did *his* life lack aught now ? Was there still a yearning after something he had missed ? Ah, no ! he is happy at last—every longing is satisfied—“ the love of his wife encompassed him, and the shadows of the past faded away ! ”

THE END.

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